

Text – James 1:9-11

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass^[a] 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.

Pray

Main Point

Money as a means of Sanctification

Introduction (300)

Hook

Why is money so hard to talk about?

Why does talking about money stir up stress and defensiveness in most of us?

Why is money such a cause of conflict and family division?

Here is a quick answer: Money is a window. It is a window to your heart. Money has an uncanny, but very accurate way of revealing the state of your heart.

Money sheds light on what is hidden in the heart.

Money reveals what you are really made of.

And sometimes that is not pretty....

- What are you willing to do to get it?
- What do you do with it once you have it?
- What happens to you when you lose it?
- What happens to us when it is removed from your?

Talking and thinking about money shows us what we treasure. Showing us what we trust in and rely on for our good.

And the bottom line becomes: Do we trust God or do we trust money?

In this portion of his letter, James address those with plenty of money and those in poverty.

And his desire for **both** groups is that they would become more like Christ, even as they think about their money, that their trust would be in God and not in money.

In some way, our interaction with money has the ability to make us more like Christ and grow our faith in God.

In some way, money is a means of Sanctification.

Outline

This point “Money as a Means of Sanctification” is what we are going to develop in two parts:

1. The Trial of Poverty
2. The Trial of Plenty

Part 1 – The Trial of Poverty

Exposition

Brief recap/background

So let us begin with “the trial of poverty.”

As you know James is writing to Christians who are facing trials.

They have been displaced out of their home land and it is not smooth sailing.

Most likely they are facing economic trials. Possibly a famine. And also facing general unfair treatment from employees.

James begins his letter by addressing how Christians are to react in these trials.

Counterintuitively, they are to count it joy, not for the trial itself, but because of what these trials are doing in them.

And as we saw last week, they are to pray to God for wisdom in the face of these trials.

And now James talks of a specific trial: The trial of money. Something we all face.

And it is very interesting, because he does not just talk of poverty, which we would expect as the obvious trial. But he also talks to the rich and encourages them in the trial they are facing too.

But, we will get to that, first we see the trial of Poverty

Lowley Brother

Verse 9 reads

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,

Now we know he is still addressing Christians specifically with the use to “brother”. A common

means to refer to those who are children of God.
Brothers and sisters all included.

And he talks specifically to the “lowly brothers and sisters”.

To ones who are in lowly circumstances.

To ones with little spare cash.

To ones who live humbly.

To ones who feels it when the price of bread increases.

To the one who dread the thought of their employer telling them there is no more work for them.

We are the Lowley brother...?

Now, many of us may relate here.

- We feel the cost of living going up.
- We notice fuel prices and interest rates are still high.
- The economy is such that many companies did not give the usual pay rise.
- We are not putting in savings as much as we would like.
- We are maybe even living from pay check to pay check.
- And of course the expected and the unexpected bills keep coming, and coming and coming.

“Lowley circumstance” Seems to describe us well.

So what James the lowly brother? What does he tell us?

Boast

We are to boast in our exaltation.

To boast is to take pride in, to glory in, to rejoice in something. That thing that gives us a sense of confidence and a spring in our step

Think of that time you first got your driving licence, or you bought your first car, or you finally bought that pair of shoes you always wanted.

As you go about your day, doing your work or your school,

you remember that that car is sitting in your garage and it brings a smile to your lips.

You remember that you are now allowed to drive and it gives you a spring in your step.

You remember that those shoes are not yours and it warms your heart.

And when you have a bad day at work or your get a bad grade, or have an argument with your sibling, in those moments, you console yourself by bringing to mind that thing you own or that thing you achieved. And it softens the blow and eases the pain.

When these good things happen, we rejoice, we take pride in them. We boast in them.

Sometimes we can't help but talk about it with others and we are obviously boasting.

But a lot of boasting happens silently in the quiet of our hearts.

Now, instinctively, we know that not all boasting is good. Some boasting is even sinful. But here we are commanded to boast. The key is what we are commanded to boast in.

Exaltation

The lowly brother is to boast in His exaltation.

The word “exaltation” is the same word to describe where Christ “ascended” to. And the same word to describe where The Spirit came from.

We are to boast in our exalted position in Christ.

Exaltation - Future

Now of course this has a future component.

As we go through poverty, we know that in heaven,

- there will be no poverty,
- no debt collectors,
- no unsatisfied hunger,
- no unquenched thirst.
- No piling up of bills and unexpected costs.
- A place we can call home forever, with no risk of eviction.

This hope of heaven gives us hope when things are tough.

We rejoice in this. We boast in this in the midst of poverty.

Peter, also talking to suffering Christians gives them the same instruction

1 Peter 1:3-5

*³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴**to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,** ⁵who by*

God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice,...

So in the midst of poverty, we rejoice in knowing that we have a home in heaven.

Just like when you are working in the rain. And it's cold and miserable and you ponder your life decisions, but you can rejoice knowing that you have a warm house you can go to.

It does not make the cold or the wet go away, but it gives you courage to persevere through the day.

Exaltation Present

But there is also a present reality we can boast in.

A present reality we can rejoice in. Part of our exaltation is that we are being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

That is what James has been talking about from the very beginning.

Look back in James 1:4, Talking of trials and the effect of trials, He says:

⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Being made perfect and complete, we know is to be made like Christ.

To be transformed into his image day by day.

To put off sin and to put on holiness.

This is God's work in our lives and our greatest good. Our redemption, specifically our sanctification in the present is our greatest good.

And if we would let it, poverty works to that end.

Application

What does poverty show about our heart?

I say “if we would let it” because poverty does not automatically sanctify us. How we react to poverty is key.

When you are put under the trial of poverty, when the bank is running low, what comes out of your heart?

- Is it envy?
- Bitterness?
- Discontentment?
- Jealousy?
- Fear?
- Hopelessness?
- Unloving towards people?

These are what you would expect to come from someone who is undergoing financial hardship, or facing debt.

Poverty brings sin to the forefront and you can choose to notice it, confess it and turn from it.

This is our greatest good. To remove sin from our lives.

This is great reason to rejoice: You, in poverty, are given the opportunity of being transformed.

In your poverty you can boast that you are being made like Christ.

But notice that poverty does not equal sanctification. Your right response to poverty results in sanctification.

Because if you choose to indulge in your sin, and be bitter, and angry and fearful, there will be no transformation. And there is nothing to boast about.

Another advantage of poverty in the present, again if you respond in the right way, is that it allows us to trust God in a specific way.

- It allows us to rely on his sovereign will.
- It allows us to trust that he knows what we need.
- It allows us to believe that He knows what is best for us.
- It allows us to rejoice in what we do have.
- It allows us to be generous even with the little we do have, and be compassionate with those who have even less.

So you can see, a right reaction to poverty will transform us into the likeness of Christ.

That is what James is getting at.

And that is worthy of boasting.

Link

But let us move on to the other side of the coin, as we think of money as a means of sanctification.

The trial of Plenty

Part 2 – The Trial of Plenty

Exposition

Now it may seem strange to call plenty a trial, but riches carry with them their own trials.

It is not without reason that Jesus said. (Mark 10:25)

“²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

We are the rich

Now I know many of us would not consider ourselves rich.

We think of the rich as anyone who has significantly more wealth than us. The actor, the football player, the CEO and the like.

Rich in that way is relative. It depends on who you compare yourself to.

But I would argue, as far as James was concerned, and compared to the majority of people James was writing to, we would be considered to be rich.

- We have clean water running (hot and cold) from the taps.
- We have pantries full of food.
- We have access to education.
- We have jobs to provide for our family.
- We have laws that protect the employee, and the tenant.
- We have relatively minimal corruption in our government.
- We own car, phones, computers and countless other items.

We may not feel rich or feel like we are in plenty, but if you look at your wealth compared to people in the rest of history, or even the rest of the world today, we all fall in the “rich” category.

This command, this exhortation, is for us, so don't tune out.

Danger of the Rich

The rich have their own trials. Sure, they are different to the poor. But trials nonetheless.

It is easy for the rich to be self-satisfied and self-sufficient.

They don't feel they have any needs. All their needs and all their wants are satisfied.

This, as Jesus tells us makes it harder for the rich to **enter** the kingdom of Heaven.

They don't "feel" their need for a saviour. They don't feel their need for grace.

"Saved from what?" They have everything they need and want...!"

If you think about it, this is a trial far greater than not being able to pay your bills.

But riches can also make it hard to grow as a Christian too. Think about it this way:

When your life can be packed with exciting things, holidays, sports, and entertainment, how hard is it to turn to Christ as your ultimate source of Joy?

Or when you can purchase anything you want with a click of a button, how hard is it to turn to Christ for your ultimate source of satisfaction and contentment?

And if the bank accounts have always been full, how can you tell if you are trusting God for your provision or trusting your own strength and wisdom?

We can see from a Redemption perspective, that wealth has lots of trials to overcome.

And James does not say to go and sell everything and become poor. That is not the solution. Again, the point is our attitude towards money, not the amount we may have.

If we are wealthy, we need to be thinking rightly about it, and so it makes sense that the rich are given a different command to the poor. A different command, but with the same goal, as we shall see.

Motivation for the rich to boast in the right thing

So what does James tell the rich?

He says in the start of verse 10, *¹⁰ and the rich in his humiliation,*

That is the “Let the rich brother boast in his humiliation”

Now it seems the rich need a bit of a shake, a bit of a splash of cold water to sober them up, for them to listen to this exhortation.

So James gives us an illustration

because like a flower of the grass^[a] 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.

James lovingly gives us a wake-up call. Just like a flower in the field, you, rich person, will fade away.

The picture of the sun rising presses home just how short out time is.

I was looking at a sunrise the other day, and when I was looking at it there is no obvious change. It seemed like all the colours would stay there for a long time. But 5, no 2 minutes, late all the colours are gone and the day begins. In the same way, sometimes we think our lives will last forever, just like the colour of the sunrise. Just like the flower in the field.

Riches seem to blind us form the obvious face that our time here on earth is short. The bible corrects this again and again.

We saw that in Ps 90 we just read. Verses 9 and 10 really drive it home.

*⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath;
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.*

*¹⁰ The years of our life are seventy,
or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span^[c] is but toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.*

Boast in Humiliation

Riches do not stop the passage of time or the reality of aging.

Do not boast in your wealth, for there is no hope there. Instead, boast in your humiliation.

- Boast in your need for a saviour.
- Boast in the fact that you had a great debt, and another paid the price you could never pay.
- Boast in the fact that you deserved to dwell in the eternal turmoil of hell, but a home is being

prepared for you in heaven, not by any merit of your own but by God's grace.

- Boast in the fact that you were an enemy of God, but he chose to forgive you.

This is what it means to boast in your humiliation.

But as a Christian, that is past humiliation, but there is also present humiliation to boast in.

Even now, as a wealthy person, you need to put off sin. You too need to fight those sinful desires.

Even now, you know the frailty of your humanity, the possibility of sickness and death, boast in your weakness, so that the power of Christ may be revealed through you.

This sentiment of "boasting in our present humiliation" is echoed well in 2 Cor 12:9

⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

You must allow God to use these riches to transform you into the likeness of his Son, and to do that, you must boast in your humiliation.

What do we rely on?

So we must check our mindsets. We must check how much we rely on our bank accounts for security, joy and satisfaction.

Do you have the mindset of "My family and I will be ok since we have 10K in the bank or 100K in the bank?"

Or because you have this life insurance or that investment property ?

Is that your mindset?

Now there is nothing wrong with saving, investment or insurance. These are good things. That is not the point.

The point is what do you trust in?

What do you boast in?

What gives us a sense of security and confidence?

What gives us that spring in our step?

- Yours savings?
- Your ability to make money?
- Your social connections?
- Your talents?

If you find yourself trusting in these things for joy, satisfaction or security, remember James's command:

⁹ Let the rich brother boast in his humiliation,

Conclusion

Tying together – One Goal

So whether rich or poor we are really boasting in the same thing.

We are boasting in our union with Christ. We are boasting in our Redemption. Past, present and future.

In that we boast,

In that we rejoice.

In that we glory in.

God has rescued us from the clutches of sin, that He is transforming us into the likeness of his son, and one day He will fully transform us in Glory.

That is what we boast in. That is what we rejoice in. Whether poor or rich.

Yes, the rich and the poor face different trials, but we must all recognise that redemption is the purpose of the trial.

Poverty or wealth are simply means of sanctification. Means of transformation.

Redemption is the goal. Relief is not the goal.

Relief from poverty is not the goal. Nor is relief from plenty the goal.

Redemption is the goal because redemption is far far far better than relief.

Our faith tested and our sanctification

This has been James's point from the start of the letter "Consider it all joy when facing trials" because this will test your faith and transform you to being complete and perfect. It will transform you to become like Christ. And money is simply one of those trials

No one is exempt from the trials of money.

Poverty or plenty each has it's trial which tests our faith and has the potential to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

Transformed so that we can praise him, glorify him and honour him to a greater extent forever and ever.

I want to close off by quoting to you 1 Peter 1:6-7 which says:

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

One day Christ will be revealed, and each trial, including poverty or plenty, will enhance our ability to praise, glorify and honour him for ever and ever. Our redemption will be complete.

How we look forward to that day!

Let us pray,