

# James

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Humility Whether Poor or Rich

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## I. Introduction

A. **James 1:9-18** . . . 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. [12] Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. [13] Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. [14] But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. [15] Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. [16] Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. [17] Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow. [18] In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.

## B. Prayer

## II. Humility Whether Poor Or Rich

A. [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.

B. The context here is that of undergoing persecution, trials, and tribulation for the cause of Christ. So before spreading this truth out to cover more than the context, let's look at what God is saying within the context of these first verses here in **James 1**.

C. [9] **But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;**

1. The phrase “humble circumstances” most probably refers to being born without noble heritage, living in poverty – or very close to the poverty line, and being considered unworthy of receiving any worldly recognition or honor.
2. The word translated “glory in” could also be translated “boast in” or “exult in” – or we might say “jump for joy” or “rejoice in.”
  - a. To boast in something may seem like a contradiction to the humility that is to be part of every Christian’s character, but to boast in a way that has you jumping for joy or rejoicing in something of noble character or of eternal value, changes the boasting from pride to humble gratefulness.
  - b. For example, after Job had experienced all the attacks of Satan on his possessions, children, and his body, he said that in spite of what had happened to him, he found comfort and consolation, and was even able to rejoice in the midst of unsparing pain over not having turned away from the words and ways of God (**Job 6:10**). If you read all of Job 6, you will clearly see that this was not a boast of pride, but rather humble gratefulness.
  - c. It is this idea of humble gratefulness that helps us understand why the NASB chose to translate the Greek word here in **James 1:9 &10** as “glory in.”
3. The kind of trials they were experiencing:
  - a. If the reference to trials in verse 2 refers to trials similar to those the readers of Hebrews were experiencing, it would include being put in prison and having their belongings and property taken away from them. In other words Christians, already living in poverty, were losing what little they had.
  - b. If the reference to trials of verse 2 is used in a more general sense, then for the poor, having to endure more hardship on top of the hardship of poverty would be like piling on more hardship to an already hard life.
4. Therefore, the idea being conveyed here is this. Christians who are of humble circumstances in relation to their status by birth, their economic condition, and/or their rank in the world, and who are undergoing persecution or other kinds of hard times, are being told to rejoice or exult or boast in the fact that they have been counted worthy, by their Lord Jesus Christ, to endure such suffering.
5. When life is already hard and harder times come,
  - a. we can allow our thoughts, feelings, or words to take us in the direction of feeling sorry for ourselves, or thinking that God

doesn't care, or telling our story in a way that makes us out to be the "poor me" victims;

- b. or, we can count it all joy that we are being given another opportunity to strengthen our faith, increase our endurance in doing what is right, and being that much more perfected as a child of God, **and** we can rejoice in the fact that in spite of our impoverished and difficult earthly state, we have been counted worthy to suffer for the name and sake of Christ.
6. The phrase "to glory in his high position" most probably is speaking of being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, though it could refer to being a child of God with the promises of eternal blessings and riches that will never fade away. We see this glorying in suffering for Christ in:
- a. Christ's Sermon on the Mount: **Matthew 5:11-12** . . . "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. [12] "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
  - b. Peter's words: **1 Peter 4:12-16** . . . Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; [13] but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. [14] If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. [15] Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; [16] but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.
  - c. The disciples: **Acts 5:40-42** . . . They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. [41] So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. [42] And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.
  - d. The apostle Paul: **Philippians 3:10** . . . that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death . . . **Colossians 1:24** . . . Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh

I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church, in filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions.

**D. [10] and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation,**

1. The descriptive words “rich man” refer to those in the church who not only have riches, but use and enjoy their riches in a way that makes it obvious to others that they are rich.
  - a. Consider: there are three primary ways we know a brother or sister in Christ possesses earthly riches:
    - (1) Using their riches on earthly possessions, pleasures, position, and/or fame in ways that make it obvious to the public that they are rich.
    - (2) Somehow making it or letting it be publicly known that they are donating to the church or para-church organizations, to non-religious charities, and to humanitarian, social, or other good causes.
    - (3) Being told by someone that this or that Christian is rich based on inside information they have. Otherwise we would not know the person or family is rich given that they live on much less than they could afford, and they do their charitable giving privately, not letting their right hand know what their left hand is doing – as the scripture says.
  - b. Two other noteworthy thing about this verse:
    - (1) The rich Christian is not referred to as “brother” but as “the rich man.”
    - (2) At that time, it was common for the rich to be of a more noble heritage than the poor, to have a higher rank or be held in greater honor than the poor, and to have possessions that are the envy of many around them.
2. Once again, the trials of verse 2 can refer to persecution or other tribulation and suffering that strip away the public honor, privileges, and possessions of the rich. In other words, their wealth, their status, and their position in the community was not enough to protect them from the varied sufferings of persecution, or from other trials and tribulation. They suffered just like the Christians who were poor, who were despised in the community rather than honored, and who were disenfranchised from the political system rather than respected and empowered.
3. Therefore, the idea being conveyed here is this. Christians who are rich, and specifically those who make a public display of their wealth,

and who are undergoing persecution or other kinds of hard times, are being told to rejoice or exult or boast in the fact that their false hope of a better life has been stripped away and they have been publicly humbled – just like their Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

E. But there is more to the message God is giving to those Christians who live like the rich. He says in verses 10-11: “... **like flowering grass he (the rich) 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.**

1. The imagery here is that of a flower or grass growing in a desert area, which when it rains, the flower blooms and the grass turns green and grows. But when the rain ends and the hot winds begin blowing over the hot sand again, both the blooming flower and green grass quickly fade and then disappear. In other words, riches are temporary. Even if we can keep them until death, they are simply temporary on a longer basis. But earthly wealth and possessions and position and fame are left behind at death. And often they are lost well before we die.
2. So the point here is that riches are not to be trusted in. Money is not a faithful god or a dependable source of security or something to put our trust in.

### III. A word about poverty and wealth

A. What the Bible says about poverty:

1. Poverty due to laziness, drunkenness, or foolishness is condemned: **Proverbs 20:13** . . . Do not love sleep, or you will become poor; open your eyes, and you will be satisfied with food. **Proverbs 23:21** . . . For the heavy drinker and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe one with rags. **Proverbs 28:19** . . . He who tills his land will have plenty of food, But he who follows empty pursuits will have poverty in plenty.
2. Poverty due to circumstances beyond our control is promised mercy and/or justice.
  - a. **Psalms 146:5-9** . . . How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, [6] Who made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them; Who keeps faith forever; [7] Who executes justice for the oppressed; Who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free. [8] The LORD opens

the eyes of the blind; the LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous; [9] the LORD protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, but He thwarts the way of the wicked.

- b. **Deuteronomy 10:17-19** . . . For the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God who does not show partiality nor take a bribe. [18] He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. [19] So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.
- 3. Poverty due to choice is commended. Jesus is our prime example of this great truth – though thousands of believers have experienced the truth down through the years, both in this life and in the next.
  - a. **2 Corinthians 8:9** . . . 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.
  - b. **Philippians 2:9-11** . . . For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

B. What the Bible says about wealth

- 1. **Deuteronomy 8:11-14** . . . Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; [12] otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, [13] and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, [14] then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
  - a. **Matthew 13:22** – parable of the four soils.
  - b. Beware of pride – of thinking you are self-sufficient!
  - c. Beware of getting caught up in riches and so forget about God.
- 2. **Matthew 6:19-21** . . . Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in

or steal; [21] for **where your treasure is**, there your heart will be also. (*Which do we treasure more, the wealth, possessions and pleasure of this earth, or God and His heavenly kingdom? How foolish it is to treasure that which has no lasting value or can provide any lasting benefit.*)

3. **Matthew 6:24** . . . No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth. **Colossians 3:5** . . . Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (*Riches can move us into idol worship.*)
4. **Luke 6:24** . . . But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full.
5. **1 Timothy 6:6-10** . . . But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. [7] For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. [8] If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. [9] But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. [10] For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. **II Corinthians 4:17-18** . . . For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, [18] while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.
  1. It is true, the things of this world – wealth, luxury, honor, position, power, pleasure – all seem to make life a little easier and certainly more pleasant while living here.
  2. I said “all seem to make life better” because that is the reality of it. They only seem to make life better for those whose mind is set on themselves and their own enjoyment and well-being in this life.
  3. But for those who are seeking the things above and who have set their mind on the things above, who enjoy praying without ceasing and delight in the nearness of God – the things of this world are empty and shallow and unable to satisfy them.
- B. May we be people of God who delight in God so much that we want God!