

## James 1:9-12 'Being Poor; Being Rich; and Persevering'

Last week's message was from James 1:5-8 'Stop; and Consider The Wonders Of God', I called it. I tried to get us to focus upon and understand the meaning of the Greek word *hegesathe*: "Consider" meaning *to be governed by*. Let our thoughts and our actions be directed, be overseen and flavoured by this. We can "rejoice," in the knowledge that all of our struggles and trials are from God, and that in His Hands they have a purpose! Yes we can "rejoice" as we consider, God's past mercies and deliverances to us. No, He will not leave us short of heaven.

And those hardships produce "perseverance" v4 so that "we be mature and complete not lacking anything." V5 "But if any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God." I sought to explain what "wisdom" is meant by here, through Proverb 9:10 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." I used this as the context from the James passage, being to rejoice through trials continues, and I sought to do this by looking briefly at the tragedies that Job suffered. I suggested that this "wisdom" which James speaks of here is asking God for understanding, comfort and peace in the eye of the storms of life. He may give us an answer as to why those things are happening to us, or like Job, He may not. But what He will most certainly do is to give us an even greater sense of His presence through prayerfully seeking Him out in His Word. Even as He spoke to Job out of the storm, chapter 38:1.

I suggested that the key to the getting of this wisdom, Job 37:14 "Stop, and consider the wonders of God." Yes, "*consider.*" Let our thoughts and actions be governed by God's generosity in providing for us in the past. Let us observe the Creation and acknowledge His Power and Glory even as He revealed himself to Job. Chapter 38: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me if you understand." Chapter 42:1: "Then Job replied to the Lord. I know that you can do all things." V6 "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you." Yes *I thought I knew who You were O Lord. But now through Your Word you have shown me who You really are.* This is the "wisdom" that God will most certainly always give us "generously," as we cry out to Him in the eyes of the storms of life!

And finally I said that the "double minded man," who is "tossed like a wave upon the ocean" is not a genuine believer at all, but someone who fleets in and out of Christianity. The "*two souled person,*" seeking to live in two worlds while never belonging to either, and having no port in the storm!

And so we move onto James v9-12, under the message title 'Being Poor; Being Rich; And persevering!' So in v9 we read: "The brother in humble circumstances should take pride (*meaning to rejoice in, to glory in, and to boast in*) in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride (*should glory in, should rejoice in, and boast*) in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower." The commentator Blanchard points out that though we are reminded that the context of the letter is the scattering of persecution, trial and hardship after Stephen's martyrdom in Acts chapters 7-8, James continues to tell his beloved parishioners to "rejoice."

V1: "Greeting" "*Xairein,*" "rejoice." V2: "Consider it pure joy." Or from the original, "*Deem it all joy whenever into various trials you fall.*" Here again, (in the most peculiar way it does seem) James again speaks of "joy." It is the Greek word "*Kaukasthw*" and it means (as I have already explained) *to glory in, to boast in, to rejoice in.* And the word which James uses for humble circumstances here, in Greek is "*tapeinos.*" And it literally translates as *one who does not rise far above the ground.* They are poor, of very low socio-economic standing. Many of them may have been slaves or former

slaves. Most likely they were not able to read or write, there was no such thing as public education in those days.

Did you know that public education began in England by Christians teaching children to read using the Bible as their text? And I'm almost certain that you do not know that public education in NSW, was begun by the Bush Missionary Society, the oldest Christian mission in Australia, which began in 1856. Burrill Pines, (which Darlene, Gary and Pauline and I were a part) here at Burrill Lake is now the backbone of this mission! It was begun by seven teenage men who had a heart for the gospel. They raised money to pay for an itinerant preacher- teacher, to travel on horseback to the way out western communities, such as Parramatta and Penrith etc in those days, teaching children to read, so that they could understand the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ. And again, he did this using the Bible as his text. That's what Sunday school began as. Children were given Sunday off from work. (Everybody worked in those days regardless of age.) But yes they were given Sunday off so they could go and learn to read and write!

But again in James' day, these lowly persecuted brethren most likely could not read or write. Indeed begging, was seen as a legitimate way to make a living. There was no social welfare system. If you didn't have a trade, if you didn't have some kind of skill, if you had no means of family support, you didn't eat! Much of what Paul did revolved around engendering support for the poorer churches, from their more well off brethren. And yet what James does here, is encourage his poor parishioners who have been scattered due to the persecution to glory in, to boast in and to rejoice in, the tremendous heights to which they had risen. To even think of where they are, and reflect upon their exalted position!

But it doesn't seem to make any sense, does it? If we think of those people living in the squalor of the slums in India, and we were to write to them telling them to "rejoice," yes to glory in and to boast in the high position to which they have ascended, would that be considerate and caring, coming from our rich position? And would it make any sense to them? Well no, it would make no sense. Indeed it would be nonsense. Yes, it would be nonsense if we were to view such things with secular, or non-Christian eyes and hearts. But if we were to shine the light of Christ's gospel down upon James' words, then they do begin to make sense. Because they mean something altogether different!

Friends one thing that the gospel, that Christianity does, is overturn cultural norms. When the gospel went into the towns of the coal miners in England centuries ago, whole towns were converted, and the people's language actually changed. Obscenities were almost a thing of the past. So much so, that the donkeys, that hauled those loads of coal up on the rails in the mines, no longer understood their masters. They actually all had to be replaced, I kid you not. You see, the only way that they had been spoken to, yes, the only commands that they understood were full of obscenities. But since the conversion of the workers, and the effect that Jesus had had upon their language, they would no longer speak as they formally did!

When Les Stewart went to Siberia 20 odd years ago with Country Network, *teaching the locals to teach the locals* was their motto. Culturally, the men's treatment of their wives, even as Christians, was appalling. So they didn't understand both Les' teaching concerning their wives, and examples that he gave while he was there with them about such things. Well, so too it would have been a cultural norm for those of a higher cultural and social standing to look down from their lofty heights upon others. It has been referred to as the class system in western societies for centuries. While in India, it is called the caste system. So insidious and despicable is this mode of society, that those who are at the bottom of community are called the untouchables. Well these are the kinds of people to

whom James now speaks! And he says “glory in, boast in, rejoice in the great heights to which you have ascended. And as we shine Christ’s gospel down upon his words we know that he means, *my dear brothers, what an exalted position you have risen to by Christ’s Blood in the sight of God. These current trials, these persecutions that you are now facing in everyday life, yes they are real and indeed difficult, but they are fleeting things my beloved brethren. So consider the eternal heights to which, that because of Jesus you have risen!*

Beloved, one of the things which the social do-gooders love to constantly speak of, (dare I say even preach of) is equality. Equal rights for this group and that group. Equal rights, equal pay, equal opportunities. Equal gender- so much so that there no longer is male or female. The big-brains trusts of our day, are even afraid to defined what a woman is! There was sticker on cars 40 odd years ago, which almost even prophetically summed all of this madness up. And it said, land rights for gay whales. As ludicrous as that statement was at the time, surely today’s madness, is infinitely worse than anyone could have ever imagined.

The reality Beloved, is that the only place where true equality, in every sense of the word, can ever be found, is in Christ Jesus! 1 Corinthians 7:21-22 “Were you a were slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you, although if you can gain your freedom do so. For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord, is the Lord’s freedman, similarly he who was a free man when he was called is called Christ’s slave.” And Galatians 3:26-29 “You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is now no Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise!”

And surely this is James` point brothers and sisters. Again, be encouraged yes, “rejoice” in the exalted place of honour that you now hold because of Jesus. Equally condemned because of sin, and equally “saved by grace through faith” because of Jesus. Praise God! So amongst the brethren, no one should ever feel that they have the right to look down upon another, because we are of the same pedigree: Of Adams line, we are born of and in sin!

Now on the other side of the coin I guess, James says in v10-11 “But the one who is rich should take pride, (should boast in, should glory in, should rejoice in) his low position because he will pass away like a flower. For the sun rises in the scorching heat and withers the plant, it’s blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.” Friends, as the poor man’s eyes have been opened to his position, his exalted and honoured place in Christ, (even given a whole new way of looking at his life), so too the rich man is given a reality check here. In the rich western world in which we live, we too should include ourselves with this rich man!

Now firstly brothers and sisters, I want you to notice that the number of words that James uses to say what he does to the rich man, is more than four times that he does to the poor man. To the poor man, it is all about encouragement and lifting up, and yet to the rich man, it is all about warning, to be not carried away by his current favourable circumstances. Because you see, according to the scriptures, the rich man or woman spiritually speaking, is in a far more precarious position! We read in Jeremiah 9:23-24 “This is what the LORD says. Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, nor the strongman boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts, boast about this. That he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord.” Jesus speaks in Matthew 13:22, of the “deceitfulness” of wealth. “Choking the word of God’s” truth out of people. And also in Matthew 19:16-24, that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of needle than for a rich man

to enter the Kingdom of heaven." Although he does go on to say, "but with God all things are possible." And of course wealth in itself is neither good nor bad, it just is. And like any tool, (which is basically what wealth is) can be used for other good or evil. My lecturer Scott Kroeger put it this way many years ago. When it comes to wealth or riches, and the way that they can affect us there are basically two kinds of people. Those who are trying to get it and those who are trying to keep it. And clearly that is what James is warning us of here! 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. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

So what is the Lord's point? It is a matter of the desires of the heart! James will go on to deal with such things a bit later in this chapter. But as I explained some weeks ago, a sober assessment of ourselves as a Christian can be one of our greatest assets. And I feel that that is what James is saying to the wealthy believer. *Now that your eyes have been opened to the fleetingness and emptiness of such things and their ability to give you any kind of real value and standing in the sight of God, praise him, that though you were once high in your own eyes and esteem, perhaps even in your self-sufficiency, now you have begun to see, how precarious and how lowly your position truly was. Yes consider amongst all of your wealth and worldly standing, how truly pitiful and poor you were! Rejoice, glory in, boast in your newly found perspective and humility.*

And James gives us this qualifying warning of his words here. "Because the rich will pass away like a wild flower." We could think of wealthy people and how they seem to love to surround themselves with their walled mansions, their fancy cars and clothes; even jet aeroplanes, with all of those things and even indeed life itself, encapsulated and symbolised by beautiful desert bloom. I guess to different degrees we can actually all be like this.

Such is the fleetingness of it all, that like those temporary meaningless things, we can be here one day and gone the next! Look at what he says. "For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant, its blossom falls, and its beauty is destroyed." Friends how often have we seen it? The proud peacock of a man goes from what appears to be the top of the world, to have it all seemingly taken away overnight. Or worse still. Their lives taken away in a moment. Unprepared to meet their maker! If we read through Genesis chapter 5, we will learn of the many great ages that men lived to prior to the flood. Those who are in the line of the patriarchs. All the way up to Methuselah who was the son of Enoch. Methuselah lived until he was 969 years old. But of all of those great ages brothers and sisters and even of Methuselah himself, there follows four small and yet very significant words. "And then he died." 13 letters in all, and yet they hold tremendous weight for every living thing.

You see in the scheme of eternity brothers and sisters, man's life, (regardless of how long he lives, what he has acquired and what he has built up, and the standing that he has gained from those around him) the scriptures tell us, man's life "is but a mist that appears and is gone." It can be summed up by this: "A flower that blooms in the morning and burns away in the heat of a Middle Eastern desert sun. V11 "For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant, each blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business." Can you see the imagery here? That person who is tirelessly going about their business. All consumed thinking of the next deal, the next \$1,000,000, even the next billion dollars today, that they are going to make. Or it might only be consumed with their own family and friends and lifestyle. Dinner out, that game of bowls or golf. The holiday away. Getting the kids to the next game of footy, even on the Lords day perhaps. Maybe it's swimming, athletics or the ballet? Or an involvement with some volunteer commitment. All of these things, (apart from prioritising other things on the Lord's day) can be fine in themselves. They can even be part of our witness and

testimony as Christians. But we mustn't miss the warning here. Life can fade away in a moment. We must soberly keep our eyes upon the prize. So as the poor man should "take pride" again, should rejoice in should glory in his newly exalted position that he has in Christ, the rich man also, should take heed of that new perspective that has mercifully being given to him as he has been shown how truly insignificant his goods and achievements are and how fleeting life is, apart from Jesus!

A description of wealth in answer to a competition many years ago was submitted as this: Money or wealth is an article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider for everything except happiness! Now we must not allow our temporary wealth and position to ensnare us, luring us away from God. That's the danger! V12 "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

Friends, again James turns to "perseverance." In v3-4 "You know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work." V12 "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial." It is not without reason that after having spoken of the lowly believer and the wealthy believer, does James turns again to "perseverance." In 13 he will move on to the temptation of sin which is yet another kind of trial. But can you see that he's pointing out that the blessing is in the persevering? In v4 it says that "perseverance must finish its work." I said some weeks ago that we are all a work in progress, and we won't be completed until we stand in the presence of the King. Yes the completed work results in the Crown of Glory. And yet James makes it very clear by the tenure of his letter, that before the Crown there must first be the Cross. And without the Cross there will be no Crown! You see both the poor believer and the wealthy believer will face trials. They will be different and yet they will both face them. The poor person faces that trial of faith that there will be food upon the table, clothes to wear and a roof over their head. The wealthy believer faces the daily trials of being ensnared by the trappings of those things that they own. Being led to believe by Satan that they have no need of God. While the lowly believer is tested daily to keep trusting in God.

Beloved, there is a Crown, but it is only given to those who "persevere." Casting aside the realities and hardships of the Cross today dear friends, for a life of ease, comfort and compromise, even denying Jesus our Lord by our actions, will not bode well when we come before the King. We must beware that we don't become that "two souled person," seeking to walk in and out of Christianity when it suits us. "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him." In 2 Timothy 4:6-8 Paul writes: "For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I've finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

In Acts Chapter 7:54-60 after his amazing defence of his faith we read of Stephen's death. "When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' At this they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this he fell asleep."

Beloved Paul saw the Crown from a distance knowing that because of Jesus it belonged to him. Stephen saw the glory of the resurrected Christ revealed, and in the midst of a violent death, he willingly laid down his life for the Crown and the Glory that awaits us. Let us pray that we are willing to do the same, knowing that our Saviour stands to receive us and place that Crown upon our head, Praise God!

Let`s Pray!