

RICH MAN, POOR MAN

James 1:9-12

Many of you have had a measure of outrage by the protests, by the murder of Americans in Afghanistan and Libya and other countries that have dominated the world news this past week. I also had outrage seeing how it is being covered by the media the USA. There is almost an apology for Islam. There is almost a justification that the problem is not the men that committed these murders but that the problem is the “nickel-and-dime” video that was put on YouTube. Certainly, there is a righteous indignation that we need to have against all types of sin. But at the same time, I was reminded by a fantastic letter that I received from RP, our missionary who is reaching Muslims.

In his letter, he brought out several points as reminders to us as Christians:

A. Remember Muslims are not our enemies

They are to be our mission fields. Satan, who has blinded their eyes, is our enemy.

Now is the time to love Muslims. This is an opportunity.

B. Remember Do not criticize Islam

Ignore their religion and talk about Jesus Christ.

A good evangelist disciplines himself to avoid distractions.

There is no record of Daniel spending time tearing down the pagan religions of Babylon. He lived and served in one of the most pagan/idolatrous cities of all history by three times a day worshipping the true God (**Daniel 6:10**). He ignored their religion(s).

C. Remember the Only Formula

Share the Scriptures with them and love them.

Let the Spirit use His Word!

2 Corinthians 5:14 – 15

D. Remember Persecution is normal (for the Christian)

The first missionary to Islam was Raymond Lull (1232-1315). His motto: *'He who lives by the Life can not die.'*

I wanted to begin with these reminders from RP's letter today because this is a prevalent and immediate situation in our world right now. It also provides a good segue into our passage in the first chapter of James. In **James 1:1-12**, the primary focus is on trials and our godly response to those trials.

INTRODUCTION

Read James 1:9-12

Proposition: Three men that we see in these four verses:

1. The **Rich Poor** Man
2. The **Poor Rich** Man
3. The **Blessed Persevering** Man

I. The Rich Poor Man 1:9

Point – At the time when James wrote this, 40-45 A.D., most of the early church was poor. Around the time of this epistle, there was a famine that increased the misery. Most of the Jewish believers in the Diaspora were poor, forced from their homes to desert their property and business.

➔ The joy of a poor man is found in the riches of Christ.

Proof – 1:9 – “But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;”

“**but**” (*de*) connects v. 9-12 with what preceded

“**brother**” – this poor believer is a full member of the body

- he uses the affectionate address – these poor men and women are part of the family of God

“**humble circumstances**” – same word used in the Septuagint:

Ps 10:18 – “vindicates the orphan and the oppressed”

Ps 18:27 – “Thou dost save an afflicted people;”

James is reminding us that God has always, in the OT and the NT, had a continual steadfast love for the poor, afflicted and oppressed.

“**glory in his high position**”

- we are to glory in our high position – the RICH poor man
- God wants to bring us back to this focus

Paul reminds us in **Romans 5:11** – “**we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**”

Take a saint, and put him into any condition and he knows how to rejoice in the Lord.

—Walter Cradock

God commands something and through the indwelling Holy Spirit, He enables us to be obedient to what He commands

- We are equipped
- command – pres imperative – ‘keep on glorying’

Application – glory in your position in Christ

What does that look like?

- We may be hungry, but we have the bread of life.
- We may be thirsty, but we have the water of life.
- We may be poor, but we have eternal riches.
- We may be cast aside by men but we have been eternally received into God's family, a joint heir with Christ
- We may not have a home on earth, but we have an eternal mansion in heaven – John 14

Trials teach us what we are; they dig up the soil, and let us see what we are made of.

- Charles Spurgeon

Illustration – During the depression, in West Texas, there was a man named Yates who was living in poverty on his farm. Like many others, he and his family were relying on government subsidies just to have food to eat. At the same time, in the midst of their poverty, an oil company came with a seismographic team to scope out his farm to see if there were any oil deposits under his farm. They believed that there was oil under his property and he granted them permission to drill. He would own it all. The drilling began producing 80,000 gallons of oil per day. Thirty years later, it was producing 125,000 gallons a day. Of course, Mr. Yates became very wealthy. The point being, that prior to the discovery of the oil, he was living in poverty despite have riches beneath his property.

In the same way, there are so many Christians, even us in the midst of our prosperity, who forget the riches of Christ.

- we will be walking about our lives and we have these vast reservoirs of eternal riches in Christ Jesus that we neglect, of which we aren't mindful.

Application – Focus on the Spiritual!

- James is reminding us that the poor believer is truly rich
- times of want encourage humility, faith and trust in God

II. The Poor Rich Man

1:10-11

Point – Rich man (everyone here) should not be distracted by wealth, accomplishments or power

- we need to glory/rejoice in the humiliation of Christ
- we need to boast in the Lord and the forgiveness of sins

This is the second trial – the trial of riches

- It is easy to understand the trial of poverty (first trial)
- It is not as obvious – the trial of riches

Proof – 1:10-11 – “**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.”**

“**and let the rich man *glory* in his humiliation”**

➔ **The Poor Rich**

John Calvin – “*James tells [us] to glory in [our] lowliness, [our] smallness, to restrain those lofty motives that swell out of prosperity.*”

Neither Jesus nor James condemns the rich merely for being rich – it is the prideful heart

Conrad Mbewe, “The African Spurgeon,” explains that the biggest problem facing the church in Zambia is what professing Christianity beams its way via satellite on their televisions.

“**because like flowering grass he will pass away”**

Illustration - This is the second illustration that James uses – the flowering grass (recall: the first illustration → the surging sea)

James 1:11 – “For the sun rises with a scorching wind, and withers the grass”

“scorching wind” – “east wind”

- “sirocco” blowing in from the Arabian desert – can be like a hot oven destroying the green vegetation in a few hours
- James was very familiar with these winds, and so was his audience.

“and its flower falls off, and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed”

- various wild flowers in the Promised Land of Israel bloom each spring with the spring rains

“so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away”

James is reminding us

- man is like a vapor – here today and gone tomorrow
- man is transitory – as his wealth and his security
- God is the Rock
- God is eternal

In the magnificent hymn **“Rock of Ages”** Augustus Toplady wrote:

*Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling.
Naked come to Thee for dress:
Helpless look to Thee for grace:
Foul, I to the fountain fly:
Wash me Saviour, or I die*

Rich man, poor man, this is the heart attitude we need to remember. We come to the cross as poor beggars deserving nothing but judgment and punishment. God receives us by virtue of the work and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We receive the gift of salvation. We don't pull up our boot straps and earn it. We bring nothing to the table for our salvation except our rebellion and sin and obstinacy which Jesus Christ has paid for.

Isaac Watts wrote similarly in his hymn, “**When I Survey the Wondrous Cross**”

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the prince of Glory died.
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

Illustration – William Borden was a wealthy Christian growing up in Chicago, the heir of the Borden milk fortune. When he was in his first year at Yale university, he committed himself to reaching the Muslims of North China. Three years later he sailed for Egypt to study Arabic before going to China. He knew that money could not mean security so before he left he gave away his inheritance of nearly one million dollars to various missions. He was in Cairo for four months when he contracted spinal meningitis and was dead within weeks. Under his pillow, they found he had scrawled on a piece of paper under his pillow the words: “***No reserve! No retreat! No regrets!***”

Application –

- The meaningfulness of want in the face of life
- The meaninglessness of wealth in the face of death

Isaiah 40:6-8

- faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God
- every promise of God that He gives to the rich and poor Christian stands true and stand forever!

III. The Blessed Persevering Man

1:12

Point – crown jewel of James’ opening statement of v. 2-12
– The Test of Suffering → the promise of reward in the future life

Proof – **1:12** – “**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.**”

“Blessed”

- A beatitude – similarities between Sermon on the Mount
- the Magnificat – **Luke 1:51-53** – similar to the heart of Mary as she sings song of praise
- profound inner joy and satisfaction as a result of enduring trials before the Lord

“who perseveres under trial”

- returns to the theme of trials (overarching **v. 2-12**)
- “**perseveres**” (**v. 12**) – comes from same root as “endurance” (**v. 3**)
- “**under trial**” (**v. 12**) – same as “trials” (**v. 2**)
- “**approved**” → (**v.12**) – same root as “testing” (**v.3**)

James is putting brackets around all of this – it is all tied together

“approved”

Psalm 12:6 - “silver tried in a furnace on the earth, refined seven times.”

It is not the idea that there is never failure but the persevering man characteristically carries on and does not give up

- Failure can be repented of and reversed
- Perseverance is a sign of genuine faith
- As part of being born again, we are characterized not by our failures but by our refusal to give up

1 John 5:5 – “And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

- God calls you an overcomer – not perfectly – but in the name of Christ

Application – Our response to trials demonstrates our true character

“**he will receive the crown of life**” – *stephanos* – wreath given to victorious athlete (1 Cor 9:25)

→ the consummation of our salvation in eternity

In **1 Peter 5:4**, Peter writes **“When the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory”**

Rev 2:10 – **“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

- This crown—referred to as “the crown of life,” “the crown of righteousness,” or “the crown of glory”—is the same crown and will be received by every believer.

The Gift of Life – **Already** been given to the believer

The Crown of Life – **Not Yet** – that is coming when we meet Jesus

Two characteristics here of the Godly rich man and Godly poor man, of the overcomer, the one who endures:

1. Endurance – through trials
2. Love – one another and those outside the church

“which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him”

- characterized by obedient love, persevering love
- we love because God first loved us
- contrast this with “double-minded” man – unstable

Ephesians 1: 7 **“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”**

Ephesians 1:18 **“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,”**

See also **Ephesians 2:7, 3:8, 3:16**

- we must not forget the untold vastness of the riches we already have in Christ

The first Adam took a stone and he cast it into the pool of sin. The ripples from that act moved out and reached the very end of the pond of mankind and penetrate every inlet, everything that we do. We are born sinners.

But Christ took the rock of God's grace and threw it into the ocean of God's mercy. Waves of God's grace wash over us in Christ repeatedly in any trial, any circumstance. It is the riches of God's Grace that shower over us need to be rooted in our heart in everything we do.

9/16/12