

James Chapter 1C

As you can see from the text that Jason read this morning we will be considering how to respond to the financial trials that come into our lives.

Jeremiah Burroughs (Puritan born in England in 1599) wrote these words and I believe they are still very relevant for us today.

“It is a common saying that there are many people who are neither well when they are full nor when they are fasting. (rich or poor) If they are in affliction, then they are obstinate and discontented. If they are in a state of prosperity, they are unruly.”

“Just like children they cry and are obstinate if you do not let them have what they want, then they are unruly. They cannot behave orderly either way. There are some people who are of such irritable and unpleasant dispositions that no matter what condition they are put into, they are obnoxious.”

Most of us would freely admit that at some point in our lives we have endured the trials of financial affliction, the hardship of economic distress. And if we are honest with ourselves, there are times when we have been obstinate and discontented.

- Whether it was eating nothing but ramen noodles for four years in college,
- Struggling to pay the rent through a season of unemployment
- Or foolishly indulging our flesh to the point where we find ourselves buried in a mountain of debt.
- Most of us, at some point have lifted our voices to God from a place of deep even desperate need.

In 36 years of marriage Sharon and I have faced the full gamut of financial trials. I would like to say (*I can't say but I would like to*) that I have learned to be content in every situation, but the Lord is still at work perfecting me.

- When we had nothing in the checkbook and the kids were sick, I prayed frequently and fervently seeking the God who heals and provides.
- I have been known to lay my hands on my oil burner and pray asking God for wisdom as to how to make it run.
- There have been many times when the grace of God has been poured out on my family in a time of deepest need.

What most people don't know is that (financial prosperity can be an even greater trial than financial lack.) Yes, you heard me correctly. (repeat)

- I would venture to say that the trials of financial abundance have led to the demise of many more people than the hardship of economic distress.

In our seasons of lack, it is easy to admit that there is no one to help but the Lord.

I think James would agree:

James 2:5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

IN seasons of prosperity, there is a temptation to rely upon our own resources. After all isn't that why God blessed us with them?

- Again this week we look to King Solomon for our example.

When Solomon was young, the trials that he faced taking the throne of his father David revealed a humble dependence on the Lord. We saw that last week when Solomon cried out to the Lord for wisdom.

- Later in life however, things became very different. When Solomon grew in wealth and his influence multiplied throughout the region, kings and queens brought lavish gifts and laid them at His feet.

Read with me this record of Solomon's wealth found in 1 Kings 10:

1 Kings 10:14 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold,

666 Talents =- 2,997,000 Pounds of Gold. At today's rate: \$1214.00 an ounce
58 Billion, 333 Million, 608 thousand dollars in Gold which came to Solomon in one year.

- The multiplication of wealth, the multiplication of Wives and Concubines (*OR as I teach the children porcupines*) turned Solomon's heart away from the Lord.
- In my opinion, Solomon is the posterchild for Failure in a test of Prosperity.

Throughout the years, I have sadly witnessed the same pattern of failure in the lives of far too many believers as they moved from rags to riches.

- The soil of their hearts is overcrowded with the weeds of this world. Early on they receive the seed of God's word and they seem to display an initial growth. However, the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the Word and it proves unfruitful. (Matthew 13)

Here in Ch. 1, James addresses the trial of Lack and the temptation of prosperity. In doing so he helps us to gain a right perspective on our material possessions.

REMEMBER friends from the first verse James is addressing believers. He is writing to the true descendants of Abraham, Spiritual Israel, those who have been scattered throughout the earth. His writings are primarily concerned with the Sanctifying work of the Lord.

- As I said before, James focus is on the Fruit and NOT the Root of our Salvation so his writing is filled with commands.

He commands us to count it all joy when we meet with trials of every kind because we know that the testing of our faith produces steadfastness, which by the grace of God eventually leads to Christian Maturity.

If we find ourselves in the midst of a trial and we discover that we are clueless, we don't know what to do, James tells us that we should ask God for wisdom because He gives it generously to all who ask provided they ask in faith without doubting.

- This is not the name it claim it, self-serving, positive confession kind of faith that is promoted on TV.
- The faith of which James speaks is a confident assurance in the revealed word of God. It is a living hope that rests upon the character of God.
- We come to God our Father as His adopted children humble yet confident in his love, his kindness, his goodness and faithfulness.
- We come in the name, and on the mercies of Jesus Christ.

It is in this context of trials that James addresses the issues of poverty and wealth, WHY, because the people of God experience difficult trials in the realm of finances.

This morning we are going to divide the next four verses into these three headings:

1. Exaltation - The poor should exalt in their low position
2. Humiliation - The Rich should exalt in the fact the God has humbled them
3. Motivation - Rich and poor find their motivation in God's final judgment

1 Exaltation

James 1:9 **Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,**

- Here in v 9 James is issuing yet another imperative, another command for those who believe; and this command is specifically addressed to **"The lowly brother."**
 - You might use these words to describe your circumstances this morning.
- The word lowly speaks of a believer who is of humble circumstances. One who is of little significance in the eyes of the world. It carries the idea of a believer who is experiencing financial need.

Historically, during the time of James' writing the church in Jerusalem and Judea was undergoing persecution at the hands of the Jews.

- Believers were excommunicated from the Temple, abandoned by their families; they lost their jobs, their businesses and subsequently their homes. Some were forced into a life of poverty because of their faith in Christ.

BUT James, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells these brothers to BOAST (present tense – boast continually) in their exalted position.

- Standing on its own, separated from the context these words of James are hard to understand. How could a life of poverty be considered an exalted position?

Well, I don't think that James is saying that Poverty is an exalted position, but that every believer rich or poor possesses in Christ an exalted possession.

- In this present material world, you may endure a season of lack, a trial of great need but you must remember the many blessings that you possess in Christ.
- It is this Exalted position that Paul describes in his letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 1: 3 **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,** 4 **even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love** 5 **he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,** 6 **to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.**

- Our trials are temporary; our standing in Christ is eternal. We are not defined by our financial status but by our union with Christ.
- We may sit for a season in the seat of the lowly but the day is coming when we stand in the presence of God to receive our great inheritance.

11 **In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,**

12 **so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.**

13 **In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,** 14 **who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.**

- Even in the midst of hardship and suffering we can boast in the Lord.

James commands these poor believers to look beyond their earthly situation and consider the eternal status that Christ has graciously provided for His beloved people. James words bring to mind the words of the Prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 9:23 **Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches,**

24 **but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."**

- Now we understand that Boasting is generally viewed in a negative light throughout the Scripture but here in Jeremiah, as it is in James, boasting is viewed differently. The brother of humble means is free to boast, to rejoice in his exalted position.

- The position of which we boast is one that has freely been given to us in Christ Jesus. Our righteous standing, Our adoption as children of God, the fact that we are seated with Christ in heavenly places is NOT our own doing, it is a position that was freely given to us by God.
- The Apostle Paul said:

1 Corinthians 1: 30 (It Is) **because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."**

- We may experience the pains of physical hunger for a season, but we can rejoice because God has given us the "Bread of Life."
- We may endure a time of physical thirst but we know, in Christ, there is a well of living water that continually springs forth from our innermost being.
- You may be poor in the eyes of this world but in the eyes of God you possess an inheritance in Christ that can never spoil, fade or pass away.
- You may have been abandoned by your family but you have been embraced by God the Father, adopted by God and made members of His household.

Moving on we need to understand that this same Faith in Christ and his coming Kingdom, the faith that gives hope to the poor man also has a significant effect on the rich man. BUT rather than Exalt him it actually humbles him.

Point 2 Humiliation

James 1:10 **and the rich (should boast) in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.**

- It's not unusual to hear a wealthy man boast of his accomplishments and his great possessions BUT it would be unusual to hear a rich man boast in his humiliation.

Jesus challenged the rich young ruler in Matthew 19 to humble himself and give all that he had to the poor and so store up great wealth in heaven.

- You know how that worked out. He walked away sad because he possessed great wealth. Jesus turned to his disciples and said.

"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," (MATTHEW 19) Does that mean that there won't be wealthy men in the Kingdom of God. NO, Jesus said:

Matthew 19:26, **"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."**

When God, through the New Birth, graciously opens the spiritual eyes of a man, rich or poor His heart is changed and he is humbled.

- Like Isaiah He sees the Lord high and lifted up.
- And Like Isaiah He see himself in a new and HUMBLE way, **"Woe is me I am undone!"**

We see this wonderfully displayed in the life of Zacchaeus (wee little man, wealthy little man, who climbed upon a Sycamore tree)

Luke 19:8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

- Luke tells us "Zacchaeus Stood" in the original language "Zacchaeus took a stand" He took a public stand acknowledging Jesus as Lord.
- His humiliation was expressed through self-denial. He said "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor."
- The fruit of his repentance is seen in his intent to restore anything he had stolen from the people four-fold. (the *highest restoration required by the Law*)
- Zacchaeus was brought LOW in humble repentance.

When the Love of God that is in Christ Jesus was revealed to our friend Zacchaeus all of the other loves in his life, the love of money, the pride of position and possessions fell away.

- John writes of this exchange of love in his first Epistle:

1 John 2: 15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world — the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life — is not from the Father but is from the world. 17 And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

- The world and everything that is in it is passing away. Why would you invest all of your time, your effort and your energy to acquire things that are perishable?

Sharon loves to have beautiful flower gardens around the house. IN the spring she spends a bit of money and a great many hours digging holes and planting flowers all around the house.

- I have to admit that there are times when I am a bit uncooperative. Not because I am cheap (I am) not because I don't want to help her dig holes (I don't)
- I can't help but think about October when the first frost hits and all of the time and money that was spent on flowers is lost. (we now plant perennials)
- James compares the rich man to the flowers of the field.

James writes: 10C like a flower of the grass 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

What have we learned? When we endure a season of lack, when we find ourselves in a place of great need we must remember the exalted position that God has freely given to us in Christ Jesus.

- We are seated with Christ in heavenly places, Sealed with the Holy Spirit, redeemed from the slave market of sin, adopted into the family of God.

If by the sovereign grace of God we enter into a season of plenty where we face the trials of riches, we should boast in our humiliation because we know that the glory of wealth is perishable and only the glory of Christ will remain.

- NOW we move on to consider our motivation:

THIRD POINT: MOTIVATION:

12 **Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.**

With this verse James takes us all the way back to his opening thoughts regarding Trials and how all of the temptations that we face are uniquely designed by God to produce steadfastness and spiritual maturity in our lives.

- James tells us that there is a great and eternal blessing, a crown of life for those who endure, those who remain steadfast in the faith until the end.

Reading this verse my mind immediately envisioned an Olympic weightlifter who lifts and holds a tremendous weight over his head looking to the judge, watching the timer, waiting for the moment when he can finally come out from under the heavy load that he is standing under.

- The clock begins when the athlete stands steadfast with the weight in his hands.
- And he waits and he waits for the final seconds to tick until he is relieved of the heavy burden.
- After having remained steadfast in the test he receives the crown. In the original Olympics victorious athletes received a laurel wreath as a crown on their heads.
- IN the same way believers who endure the trials of this life and remain steadfast to the end will receive the crown of life.

This same phrase, “Crown of Life” is used in the book of Revelation when the Lord Jesus addresses one of the seven churches in Asia Minor, the church at Smyrna.

Revelation 2: 8 **“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: ‘The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. 9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.**

- Smyrna = Myrrh – Bitterness – Smyrna was a persecuted church, a church that endured great hardship and poverty and remained steadfast.

10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

- The crown of life awaiting all who trust in Christ and endure the trials of this life.

The Personal Application of this portion of James remains the same regardless of your economic standing.

- If you find yourself enduring a season of lack, struggling to make ends meet, lift your eyes to the Lord and rejoice in your exalted position.
 - If indeed you are “In Christ” you can look to him for your contentment and say with the Apostle Paul, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
- If you are enduring a trial of Excess a test of prosperity.
 - I encourage you to turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.
- If you are here this morning and you have never submitted to the call of God to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - I encourage you to see the glory of God’s mercy and grace in the person of Jesus Christ.
 - He bore the wrath of God for the sin of all who will look to him and believe.
 - Why would you continue to languish in a sea of guilt and condemnation when the blood of Christ removes the sin of all who believe as far as the east is from the west?