

Ministry of Grace Church

James 1:9-15 - Speaker Notes

Introduction

After his salutation, James started this letter with the words, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds” And – you will recall that the word translated “face” actually means to fall into a situation and to be surrounded. This is something that all Christians can relate to because it happens to all of us, and we are told to consider it a joyful event. Based on the verb tense, however, we know that this is not a command, but it is a very strong suggestion. It’s not something that Christians must do, but ignoring this suggestion will result in the loss of joy in our lives and the loss of a crown in eternity.

Remember that enduring these times of trial produces the quality of perseverance. When we learn to be patient in our times of testing, we are allowing God to help us grow into more mature Christians. However, when we complain about situations like this, we miss out on an opportunity to grow closer to God. What I mean is that in these times of trial we can either get angry with God or we can turn to God for assistance and relief. The proper thing to do is to ask Him for wisdom to know what we should do.

However, instead of turning to God for wisdom, most of us get angry with Him and complain. We wallow in our self-pity which produces an action in us that is always counter-productive. That action is that we compare ourselves with others. We say, “Lord, why do I have to be so poor, why do I have to be so weak, why do I have to be so insignificant?” Why didn’t you make me wealthy, healthy, attractive, and popular like others around me?

And, because this attitude is so common among Christians who are going through trials, James addresses it head-on with a lesson in self-examination.

James 1:9-11

The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.

There is some disagreement as to what James meant by “in humble circumstances.” The Greek word means to be depressed or humiliated. However, given the context, it seems most natural that he is making a reference to a Christian brother or sister who does not have riches, who does not have health, or who has a lowly station in life. This is based primarily on the fact that in the next verse James speaks to the one who is a rich person. The thesis of this entire section of James’ letter is that we should find delight in trials and some of the most difficult trials are poverty and lack of health.

It’s pretty easy for us to see why poor people are to boast, or glory, or take pride, in being raised-up by Christ and put on an equal footing with all others in the church. But why would someone with great possessions take pride in being humbled? When we are humbled before God, we realize how fleeting wealth is and that we owe everything we have to Him, because it has all come from

Him. After all, we are not on this earth to gain possessions; rather we are here to glorify God. Unfortunately, many people don't accept that, so let me say it again. We are not on this earth to gain possessions; we are here to glorify God.

Wildflowers are quite beautiful, but they are also very delicate and temporary. It only takes a single day's worth of hot, scorching sun and wind before they wither and disappear. The same is true with a rich man's riches; they are only temporary possessions, not eternal. We humans look on the outward things, the attractive things, the possessions. However, these things can be stripped away in an instant. The real wealth is that which is produced by trials, including patient perseverance, humility, and strengthened faith. The most valuable thing a man can have is a humble submission to the Almighty Ruler of the earth.

Even a rich man who lives a long life will one day cease to exist on this earth. In the eternal state, he will be no different from the poor beggar except for the spiritual riches that either one of them have sent on ahead of time. Take as an example, the story of the rich man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:19-31](#)) This is not a parable. A parable never mentions names and usually has language of similitude such as "like or as." This story mentions names and has no language of similitude. This is a true story, not a parable.

James 1:12-15

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. When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

Let's look at a few of these words. The word translated "perseveres" is *hupomonē*, which we looked at last week. It literally means, "to remain under." Metaphorically, it refers to "patient endurance" or "perseverance." The words "has stood the test" are from the past tense form of *dokimadzō*, which means "to be found valuable, or approved, by testing." So, we could translate verse 15 as:

Blessed is the man who patiently endures a trial, for having been found worthy he will receive the crown of life ...

Not only has James taught us that we are blessed when we encounter various trials (i.e., temptations and sufferings) but he promises us that we will receive more blessings when we endure them. James is summing up what he has been talking about for 11 verses now; the person who patiently endures, who stays humbly submitted to his or her Lord throughout the difficulties, sufferings, and trials of life will come out more refined and more Christ-like.

James does not promise us that we will be given riches when we endure our trials. But he does say that if we endure our trials with an ever-strengthening faith, we will one day receive a crown of life which is promised to those who love God. This is one of the crowns that we will be able to cast at the feet of God proclaiming His worthiness, as depicted in [Revelation 4:10](#).

In verse two, James made the point that falling into various temptations produces a trying or testing of our faith. In this verse he is making it clear that God is not the source of the temptation. But He does allow us to go through various trials. God cannot be tempted to sin, and He does not tempt us to sin. It is our old adversary with his world system (the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life) which enflames our sin nature, causing us to be tempted (see [1 John 2:16](#)).

God has no sin nature and there is nothing in the world system that He does not already have so He is not tempted.

When we sin, however, we have no one to blame but ourselves. We cannot claim the old Flip Wilson line, “The devil made me do it!” And we cannot blame our parents, or the way we were raised. The sin comes from within, and it can only be taken care of from without; that is, by the blood of Christ.

We all have desires, and they are necessary for sustaining life. We have the desire to eat, we have the desire to rest when we are tired, we have sexual desire, we have the desire to achieve, along with many others. All of these are good and necessary in the proper balance. It is when any one of these becomes too great, even uncontrollable, that we get tempted to sin.

This is not to say that Satan and his fallen angels have no part in our temptation. In both [Matthew 4:3](#) and [1Thessalonians 3:5](#) we find that our adversary is referred to as “the tempter” (the Devil’s name, *diabolos*, means “tempter”) and he uses the world system, which he controls, to create that temptation.

Once again James uses a play on words to make his point:

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

We were told in the previous verse that we are drawn away and enticed by our own evil desire, or lust. Now we are told that when that lust has grabbed hold of us it produces sin, which then produces death. So, in a sense, we are told that death is the grandson of lust.

So what?

Being poor or being in poor health can be humbling and at times it can even be humiliating. James commands those of us who are in a humble station in life to take pride in it. His reason for this is that the lowly person is actually elevated, or lifted up, by God when he becomes a Christian. In Christ we are all on the same level and God receives the glory.

Keep in mind what we learned several weeks ago. God chose us because we are foolish, weak, and lowly in the world, like stupid, weak, pond-scum.

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ([1 Corinthians 1:27-28](#))

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus ([Luke 16:19-31](#)) we saw that while on this earth the rich man had all this world had to offer, while Lazarus had nothing, not even health. However, after death, because of his faith, Lazarus was elevated to an exalted position by the side of Abraham, while the rich man, due to his lack of faith, was tormented in flames.

If you are lacking in the things that this world has to offer, then you know how humbling it can be. Instead of complaining about it, however, you should give God the glory for raising you up in Christ Jesus and making you His child.

Take Job as an example. He had great wealth. Yet, through the hand of God, it was taken from him by Satan, not because Job was evil, but because God allowed Satan to do it. Even Job had to learn that it is God who rules the world, not himself, and certainly not riches.

Then Job answered the LORD and said:

“Then Job replied to the LORD: "I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. ... My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1, 2, 5, 6)

Job didn't visibly see God. (In Job 40:6 it says that God spoke to him out of the storm.) Through this humbling experience, he knew God better. He saw how God was taking care of him and he submitted his life to his Lord and Master. One day when this life is over, you will assuredly give glory to God for His having made you His child!

We are all on a journey through this life. And, like the great men of faith listed in Hebrews chapter 11, we should recognize that we are but strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Let us realize this: all that we are and all that we have are gifts from God. All of our possessions come from Him, so let us give Him the praise and the glory for everything.

Will you have a crown to cast before your King some day? Or will you be in the crowd thinking, "I wish I had a crown to cast before Him?" Hang in there and endure the trials of life, always looking to the author and finisher of our faith. Patient endurance is not easy, but it is rewarding, both now and eternally!

As I said earlier, we all have desires and many of them are necessary for our existence. Some of them can be very strong. When we give in to those strong desires, we do so to gain something: pleasure, power, possessions, accomplishment, etc. Instead of getting what we thought we wanted, however, what we get is death. Physical death is the separation of the body from the soul and spirit, and it breaks our fellowship with those we have known in the flesh. The death caused by sin is spiritual death, it separates us spiritually from all that is holy and breaks our fellowship with God. Just as the Father could not look upon the Son for those three hours as he hung on the cross bearing our sins, He cannot be in fellowship with us when there is sin in our life.

Likewise, as Adam and Eve thought they would gain something from eating of the forbidden fruit, they, instead, got death. They died both in a physical sense, in that they began physically dying that day, and eventually they were cast out of the garden. And in a spiritual sense they died, in that they no longer felt a close fellowship with God so they hid from Him and were afraid. When we give in to our selfish desires, we are putting our own will before God's will. This is the exact opposite of humbling ourselves before God and submitting to His will. Selfish satisfaction produces separation from God whereas humble submission produces close fellowship with God.

Satisfying our lusts is an act of putting our will and our desires ahead of what God wants for us. It is taking the throne in our own life instead of giving it to the One who truly deserves it. When we go through trying times, it is easy to roam from God, to get "weary in well doing," to blame God, and to basically quit trying. James is encouraging us to hang in there during such times, not allowing ourselves to be led astray, because as brothers and sisters in Christ we are all loved by God.

Let's pray.