

James 1:9-11
“The profit of poverty and the pitfall of prosperity.”

- I. Introduction**
- II. Vs. 9 The profit of poverty**
- III. Vs. 10-11 The pitfall of prosperity**

I. Introduction

James links verses 9-11 with verse 2 and finding joy in trials with the same kind of paradoxical statement saying, *“let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation.”* This “mark” of “glory” is set against the double-minded man who didn’t ask in faith. What we can say generally about this is that the pessimistic attitude is not to be part of the Christian character. Further more the Christian optimist is not one that is blind to the facts of their situation either but is optimistic in spite of them. The Christian is called to “glory” in the midst of trials no matter what state they are in fiscally. Our joy is to be independent from our perceived earthly condition and there are no class distinctions in the body of Christ. Webster defines a paradox as a *“statement that is seemingly contradictory yet is perhaps true”*. One person described in biblically as *“truth standing on its head shouting for attention”*. James writes of another paradox in these three verses as he speaks of the *profit of poverty* alongside of the *pitfall of prosperity*. Trials often cause the believer to reassess what really matters in life as they evaluate their priorities. It is uncommon for such trials to effect a person’s economic status as those who have enjoyed prosperity suddenly find themselves dealing with poverty. In both of these conditions the believer is exhorted to rejoice or glory the poor over their exaltation and the wealthy over their humility!

II. Vs. 9 The profit of poverty

Vs. 9 *The warning James is offering to his readers is the tendency to evaluate our trial by our present fiscal position.* There are few things that can test our attitude better than a trial that comes upon our financial position. We will quickly see if we are growing in Christ when we face the loss of money. James speaks of two extremes and both will test our growth in Jesus: *poverty and prosperity.* In Christ that which the world despises is not valued the same as the low in Jesus are elevated to the height of Christ the Son of God as we are joint heirs with Him. The majority of the readers of James' letter would have been economically poor and were no doubt facing even further material losses due to their faith in Jesus. James himself grew up in this state as Mary said of herself in Luke 1:48 that God had, "*regarded the lowly state of His maidservant*". They were so poor that at the birth of Jesus they couldn't afford a room and at Jesus' dedication in the temple could only afford the least offering of "*A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.*" And if as believed Joseph died soon after Jesus' 12th birthday they had very little to live on. To those readers James tells them that they "*glory in their exaltation*" while the "*rich in their humiliation*" God's testing brings about equality no matter what your financial situation.

- A. *The Poor:* Learn that they possess spiritual riches that cannot ever be taken from them.
- B. *The Wealthy:* Learn that the riches in Christ neither wither or fade when trials come.

James describes the "*Profit of Poverty*" in a way that few would, saying they should glory in their exaltation. *He challenges the believer who is in the grips of poverty not to gripe about it but "glory in their exaltation" because of it.* They can do so because *such loss of worldly wealth causes the poor to realize they are wealthy in the riches in Christ.* It is here that Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21 reminded His disciples saying, "*Do not*

lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” It is the “**faith**” of verse 6 that will remind them of their exalted position. This is the position that Paul prayed that the Ephesians would come to comprehend in Ephesians 1:18 saying that “*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.*” The question is: **How is the person in poverty exalted and the answer is in their riches that have in Christ. The exhortation for the person in poverty is to reassess their true riches as their identity and sufficiency is in Jesus not in material things! We are all, poor and wealthy, part of God’s royal family through Jesus!** Consider the words of Jesus in Luke 4:18 “*The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because **He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.***” Isaiah wrote in 55:1 “*Ho! **Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.***” **The moment the poorest soul comes to Jesus we become joint-heirs with Jesus and as such they become the wealthiest on earth and for eternity! We must willing be God’s nothings if He is going to do something through us.** Paul spoke of this in 2 Corinthians 8:9 “*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*” Let us not as Paul said in Romans 2:4 “*despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering,*

not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?" **The believer's wealth can never be counted in dollars but peace, righteousness, hope and joy. And trials endured can never take away true wealth it will only add to it!** There is no such thing as poverty and prosperity as the rich are poor and the poor are rich and are all one in Jesus who has pay the same ransom for all! **The poorest of all still have the same resources available to them through Christ as those who have earthly means.** It was the lower class of the first century that church made many in roads as they were not reduced to 2nd class citizens. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26 "*For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.*" There weren't many but it doesn't say that there weren't ANY, as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Barnabas all were men of means.

III. Vs. 10-11 The pitfall of prosperity

Vs. 10 This sentence in the Greek is difficult to understand as it is without a noun or a verb. There is little doubt that the context of the passage in verse 10 should also carry the glory in his exaltation given to the "**lowly brother**" so that it should say, "**but the rich glory in the exaltation of humiliation**". The question is who does James have in mind as to the identity of the "**rich**"? **Is it the unbeliever,** as some think because they are dealt with more abruptly in this letter in as we see in 2:6 where they are said to have "*dishonored the poor man*" or 5:1 where they are to "*weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon them?*" Is it this unbeliever whose wealth will fade away in verse 11? **Or is it the wealthy Christian,** as the use of the word "**brother**" seems to indicate? **Most believe that this is a reference to the believer who has wealth but struggles with it's blessings and falls for its curse.** The wealthy that had come to Christ would have to deal

with a new set of circumstances that were not the norm for the wealthy, scorn, humiliation that were usually reserved for the poor. And if they placed spiritual things above material they would lose their position among the wealthy in their neighborhoods. James therefore seems to be encouraging them that such humiliation is not something to be avoided but embraced as it indicated the right priorities that a relationship with Jesus has produced. Paul warned of this to 1 Timothy 6:17-19 saying, “*Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*” ***One of the perils that the wealthy are susceptible too is their confidence in their riches at the expense of their doubt of God’s provisions.*** Another problem associated with worldly wealth is that it makes it difficult for a person to humble themselves as it makes them a target of pride and a sense of superiority. Jesus didn’t declare it impossible for the wealthy to be saved but He did say it was difficult. For the Jew to receive Jesus would mean the loss of all their inheritance and they would be cut off from their families.

Vs. 11 ***James reminds the wealthy that everything in this life is temporary like the beautiful flowers that carpet a hillside will only dazzle the public for a few weeks in the Spring but will disappear as soon as the heat of summer comes.*** Wealth, like the flowers in Spring are transitory and temporary and as such an apt illustration of worldly wealth. The “*pitfall of prosperity*” requires a considerable more amount of warning than does the person dwelling in “*poverty*” as they deal greater with pride so James reminds them of temporary nature of external riches as seen in the fate of beautiful flowers and the green

grass in the fields, which spring up quickly but soon wither at the noon heat of the day. Jesus places all people on the same level as heirs with Him as He was number amongst the lowest that He may raise everyone to the Father. When we are going through a trial like this we will need to **ask then answer three important questions:**

1. **Did God bring me here? Is it His will that I am in this place in my life?** If the answer is yes, then I need to find my rest where He has placed me!
2. **Will God keep me here in His love and give me His grace to endure through this trial to become more like Him?** If yes, then I need stay where I'm at so that His love and grace will perfect my weakness. God will make this trial a blessing and teach me lessons that I need to learn and bestow the grace I need to grow.
3. **Will God when He is finished perfecting me with this trial bring me out how and when it is best?** If **yes**, then I can with 100% certainty know that I am here in my present circumstances and situation by: **God's appointment and design, I am here in God's keeping and care, I am here under God's training and perfection, and I am here with God for His pre-appointed duration and when He is done with this He will release me!**

James gives his readers 5 truths that will cause us to realize that we are victors and not victims in our "basic training of trials":

1. Celebrate the reason behind our trial!
2. Calculate the result of our trial!
3. Call upon God's resources in our trial!
4. Consider our reaction to our trial!
5. Contemplate the reward of our trials,!

Martyred missionary Jim Elliot once said, "**He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he can never lose.**"