

## **Attitude is Everything**

### **James 1:9-11**

My Grandma Bea had a hard life. I never knew my grandfather. He walked out when my Mom was 14 leaving Grandma to raise 6 children on her own. I understand he would occasionally show up and ask for some money and then he'd be gone again for long stretches of time. Grandma didn't make much money herself working in the hospital as a cleaning lady, but she did the best she could to provide for her family. She once said "I never knew how poor I was till the government told me."

She attended the First Baptist Church in her little town of Black River in upstate New York. Her life was sustained by a strong faith in the God she loved and served, and He faithfully provided.

She understood well verses like **Philippians 4:11-13** "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

**I Timothy 6:6-8** "But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that."

**Hebrews 13:5** "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

Yes, my Grandma had a hard life, but she had a strong faith. She knew where her true riches were.

Our passage today in James is more than just about money or about contentment in whatever state we find ourselves. It is about the faith we need in everyday situations that include whether we are rich or poor. It's about knowing where our true riches are. Turn in your Bibles to **James 1:9-11**.

**How do we live as believers in all the trials that will come our way and in the passage before us how do we live whether poor or rich.? James tells us in both cases what our focus should be.**

I have a simple outline today from which we will discuss three things from this passage.

The attitude we are to have about our poverty.

The attitude we are to have about our prosperity.

The attitude we are to have about our position.

### **I. THE ATTITUDE WE ARE TO HAVE ABOUT OUR POVERTY – v. 9**

**"The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position."**

That doesn't seem to make any sense. **How does a person in humble circumstances take pride in his high position?**

Let me remind you from **verse 1** that these Jewish Christians to whom James is writing had been scattered throughout the Roman world. He's not writing to believers in Jerusalem or even in Judea. They are all over the place. John MacArthur suggests that many of these believers had probably been fairly well-off financially with good businesses, but because of persecution their homes and possessions were confiscated or abandoned, forced to scatter abroad and eke out a living. It left many on the fringe of poverty.

Persecution has existed since the church began 2,000 years ago. A letter this past week from Voice of Martyrs told of persecution of Christians in India last September that drove believers into the jungle. The persecutors confiscated food from their homes. Churches were demolished, services disrupted, Bibles confiscated and burned. Pastors were beaten and jailed. Christians are often falsely charged with forcing Hindus to convert to Christianity. Their intent is to purge the country of believers and make it a Hindu nation.

Open Doors USA is another organization that monitors persecution of believers around the world and indicates that there was a 60% increase in persecution of Christians last year. Persecution of

Christians has increased every year for the last 15 years. You can go to their website and find the top 50 countries where persecution is greatest. The top 10 would be no surprise.

But sadly, persecution is occurring within the borders of our own country. No churches aren't being burned, Bibles confiscated or believers forced to flee for their lives. It's a more subtle form of persecution couched in terms like tolerance, equality, and human rights. We watched as a cake decorator and a florist were put on trial for refusing to serve gay couples because of their Christian faith. It has been evident in this past year when churches and attenders were fined for holding drive-in worship services all under the smokescreen of attempting to curb a pandemic. Let me be clear that this pandemic is real, and it is deadly, but suggesting that churches should close while other business remain open suggests more than just an effort to slow down the spread of this virus.

This last week I received a letter from Dr. Dobson of Family talk. The essence of the letter has to do with a fundamental shift in American culture that will unfold at breakneck speed with this new administration. At the heart of the issue is the passing of the Equality Act. If approved, here are just a few of the provisions of this egregious act which attack the fundamental truth of the Bible and our faith:

It would force people of faith to violate their consciences in regard to human sexuality and gender.

It would also spell an end to sex-specific locker rooms and other private spaces putting women and girls at risk.

It would allow biological men to compete in women's sports.

It would gut the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which was passed in 1993 by a unanimous U.S. House and nearly unanimous Senate.

Children in our overloaded child welfare systems could be left without homes, if faith-based providers are forced to choose between abandoning their beliefs or closing their doors to children.

Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare providers

could be forced to participate in abortions or radical "gender transition" procedures. If they refuse, they could lose their licenses to practice.

Religious liberties would be assaulted, something that is operational in many states already. As you know, many churches are shuttered, while bars, casinos, and abortion clinics are exempt as "essential services." This is just the beginning of harassment and persecution."

There has been a lot in the news about the way in which the social media giants are targeting conservative thought and speech, cancelling accounts or altering the content that you see on those feeds through an algorithm that lets you see the content of what they want. We are branded as bigots and homophobes, because we don't embrace tolerance, holding on to what they deem as an archaic form of religion that need of overhaul to get with the times. Conform or else. If the Equality Act passes, Christian colleges and faith-based organizations will be required to hire people who do not share the same Biblical values, if they hold them at all. **How long will it be before they attempt to silence the voice of the truth of the gospel?**

We saw in the last administration that believers with a strong biblical testimony and stance on marriage or life were scrutinized by members of Congress during confirmation hearings of various appointments. Faith is becoming a Litmus test as to a person's ability to hold public office. That is a form of persecution and they say we're intollerant.

We could go on and on and on but know that we're only a pen stroke away from increased persecution. **So what does all that have to do with our passage?**

James is writing to believers who had undergone some form of persecution resulting in their being scattered. **How were they to respond?** Essentially beginning in **verse 2** he tells us it's about attitude. In **verse 2** it's the attitude of pure joy in trials. In **verse 3** it's the attitude of persevering in trials because they develop our faith and mature our Christian walk.

In **verse 5** it's the attitude of asking for wisdom in trials so we'll know how to live as a Christian.

And then here in **verse 9** it is the attitude of pride in humble circumstance.

Now let's first talk a moment about the word humble. It's not what we think of when we hear that word. It is not in reference to how we see ourselves or the attitude with which we have about ourselves, but rather has to do with our state or status. It's referring here to our socio-economic state. Essentially it has to do with poverty.

The Phillips translation states it clearly **"The brother who is poor."**

When Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth after the angel had told her she would be the mother of Jesus, she said: **"My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant."** She wasn't referring to her humble character, even though she was; she was speaking of her social status of being poor.

James says that the person who is poor should take pride in his high position. **What high position does someone have who is poor? How can a person have pride in poverty?** He can when we understand the high position to which James is referring.

Another word that can be exchanged for the word pride is the word rejoice. In this sense pride is not a negative term but a positive one.

**So just how does a person rejoice in his poverty? Does he take on the attitude of my grandmother who didn't know she was poor?** James has something else in mind here because he doesn't mean to rejoice in his poverty. He is to look beyond his physical needs and consider who he is and what he has yet coming to him. Let me explain.

The high position James is talking about is his position in Christ. That's something worth taking pride in, something worth rejoicing in. Put your present circumstances aside and consider who you are in Christ and what you have that awaits you in heaven for eternity and rejoice in that.

**Romans 8:35-39**

The believing person who is in poverty is to rejoice

because his earthly status is only temporary.

**Luke 16:19-25**

Jesus said we would suffer some form of persecution and Paul adds that it's only temporary. As a matter of fact, Paul says what we have waiting for us is beyond our comprehension and will be well worth the wait and well worth all the trials and persecution we encounter here.

**II Corinthians 4:16-18**

James is telling us to put things into perspective when we consider our position in Christ and what awaits us in heaven. Jesus told us not to store up treasure on earth where moths can eat it or rust decay it or robbers can steal it. Instead store up your treasure in heaven where nothing can touch them. This is a call to have an eternal perspective. Even the poor have eternal wealth that awaits them in heaven. While earthly riches can be taken away, spiritual riches in Christ cannot. Our position in Christ gives reason for us to rejoice in that high position.

John Phillips writes **"The brother who is poor may be glad because God has called him to true riches."**

Our hymnal has a song that bears the truth of this verse. (#574 A Child of the King)

My Father is rich in houses and lands,  
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands!  
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,  
His coffers are full, He has riches untold.

o I'm a child of the King,  
A child of the King:  
With Jesus my Savior,  
I'm a child of the King.

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,  
A sinner by choice, an alien by birth,  
But I've been adopted, my name's written down,  
An heir to a mansion, a robe and a crown.

A tent or a cottage, why should I care?  
They're building a palace for me over there;  
Though exiled from home, yet still may I sing:  
All glory to God, I'm a child of the King.

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No matter what your status here on earth, the truth

of that song echoes the truth of Scripture regarding your eternal inheritance and that should excite you as you think about what you possess as a believer.

Even though poverty may come from persecution we are called on to rejoice because of our high position in Christ.

On the other hand, what if you are a person of some means. You aren't in poverty, but instead you enjoy prosperity. **What does James say your attitude should be in that situation?**

## II. THE ATTITUDE WE ARE TO HAVE ABOUT OUR PROSPERITY – vs. 10-11

**“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.”**

**Just what low position is James talking about that someone who is rich should glory in?** There aren't too many rich people who have bemoaned their wealth. As a matter of fact, many want more. But there are some examples of those who have given up their wealth for the cause of Christ.

Francis of Assisi is such an example. He was born into a home of prosperity, but when he chose an entirely different lifestyle his parents were appalled because it wasn't how he was raised. In their opinion, he lived in absolute squalor and gave what little he had to the poor and destitute. At one point, his father locked him in the cellar and then took him before the local bishop demanding that his son recant his new lifestyle. Seizing on the situation, Francis took off all his outer clothes and returned them to his father. Underneath he wore a hair shirt and then put an old smock that had belonged to a farmer. He thought it was fitting enough for a beggar and follower of Christ.

Another example is Francis Xavier, born in a Spanish palace enjoying pleasure as the darling of society. He eventually gave it all up to become a

monk traveling to India and Siam to preach the gospel. He was ridiculed, beaten, stoned and persecuted all the while preaching to Kings and cannibals alike.

Then there is C.T. Studd who was born into wealth and educated in two of Britain's prestigious schools. After hearing D.L. Moody preach, he was saved, gave away all his fortune and sailed to China. To fit in, he wore Chinese clothing living among them. He later went to India and Africa to preach the gospel.

Those are examples of the exceptions to what James is speaking about here – people of substance, people who know no need. **What is the attitude James calls them to in these verses?**

**Is it possible that as James is speaking about trials, that the person of wealth who undergoes a trial by which he may lose all that he has should glory in that?** Job serves as a ready and apt example after hearing of the loss of all he had gave praise to God. **Job 1:20-21**

John Phillips suggests something else to consider. “The rich may be glad that God has shown him his spiritual poverty for the rich man, as such, will wither away as surely as summer flowers. One day the summer brings a scorching wind; the grass withers at once and so do all the flowers – all that sight is destroyed. Just so surely will be the rich man and all his extravagant ways fall into the blight of decay.”

Being poor doesn't make a person more spiritual and being rich doesn't make a person sinful. But Jesus warned about how difficult it is for a rich person to enter heaven, because they cling to their tangible goods that someday will run out. Like grass in searing heat, it will wither up and be gone.

### **Mark 10:23-25**

Jesus also warned in **Matthew 13** when he told the parable of the sower that riches will come along and choke out the Word.

There are two old sayings which you are aware of. You never see a U-Haul truck following a hearse. There are no pockets in burial shrouds.

Everything a rich person has will be left behind. Job said that. One day it will all fade away. James makes a comparison between the rich man and a flower. Both will end up the same. And notice how James ends **verse 11: “the rich man will fade away *even while he goes about his business.*”** (Emphasis added) One day he is working hard and the next day it’s all gone or he’s gone, just like the wealthy man who built bigger barns to store his vast harvest thinking it would sustain him.

That he has riches and that his riches are taken away is a test, a trial God is using to help the person mature in his faith.

Warren Wiersbe states it this way: “It is not your material resources that take you through the testings of life; it is your spiritual resources.”

John MacArthur adds this note of explanation: The idea is that a believer who is materially well-off; healthy and otherwise physically blessed should rejoice when trials come, for they teach him the transitory nature of those material things and their inability to give inner and lasting satisfaction or help, especially spiritual help.”

Whether rich or poor, the best thing is to stick close to the Lord and let Him do His work in you so that you can mature in your faith. We have a natural tendency to trust our resources so James gives it some special attention reminding that it will eventually fade and that it is better to trust the Lord in times of trial. Like the person who is poor, it’s better to focus on what we have in Christ that never fades and will last for eternity.

**Regardless of your status, where is your focus?** If it’s on the trial and the resulting anxiety that comes with it you will be filled with despair and lack hope. If it’s on Christ and the maturing of our faith He develops through it we will focus on what is eternal. Whether in poverty or prosperity, our attitude should be fixed on Christ and what we have in Him. We can be physically poor, but spiritually rich or we can be physically rich, but spiritually poor. God can use trials in the life of the poor to show them that what they possess in Christ is of far greater value.

## **I Peter 1:3-9**

He can just as easily use trials in the life of the rich to remind of spiritual poverty and the need to pursue what is eternal and not temporal, what is lasting vs. what can fade.

## **Revelation 3:17-18**

The focus shouldn’t be on having little or having much, **Matthew 6:33** tells us that our focus should be on seeking God’s kingdom and righteousness.

**Jeremiah 9:23-24 “This is what the Lord says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man 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,’ declares the Lord.”**

If poor, what is your attitude?

If rich, what is your attitude?

Let me close our message this morning by talking about the attitude we are to have about our position.

## **III. THE ATTITUDE WE ARE TO HAVE ABOUT OUR POSITION**

In **Ephesians 3:8-9**, Paul speaks of the unsearchable riches in Christ that are his. In **1:3**, Paul says he is blessed by God “**in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ**” because He chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless and predestined us to be adopted as His sons.

The word unsearchable in the Greek refers to something that can’t be fully comprehended. We will never know the depth of what we have in Christ or the measure of His worth, but Paul gives a go at listing some of those unsearchable riches in **Ephesians 1:7-14.**

Redemption through His blood

Forgiveness of sins,

Knowledge of the mystery of His will

The message of truth

The sealing of the Holy Spirit

The guarantee of our inheritance

They are of inestimable value, far more than

anything we can possess here on earth.

In 2018 a French family found an unexpected treasure in their attic. Wrapped in a shoebox was a vase from an 18<sup>th</sup> century Chinese dynasty sold for \$19 million dollars at auction.

Our riches in Christ have eternal benefits that we can't begin to put a value on. Jesus even explained through two parables the vast riches of heaven by describing them in **Matthew 13:44-46**. One parable likened heaven to a guy who found a great treasure in a field selling everything he had just to buy that field with its vast wealth.

The other parable was about a merchant who found a pearl of incredible beauty and value. He too went and sold everything to buy that pearl.

Only by giving up what we think is of value and coming to Christ on His terms will be granted the unsearchable riches of heaven.

According to **Colossians 2:3**, these unsearchable riches include **“all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** and in **II Peter 1:3** **“everything we need for a godly life”** through all the **“great and precious promises”** that are ours in Christ.

These riches are given by God when, according to **John 3:16**, we believe in Christ so that we will not perish but have everlasting life. These riches are not just for some, they are not just for those who have sinned only a little. We are all great sinners in need of a great Savior who has unsearchable riches that meet our need both now and for eternity granting to each believer eternal life and splendor of heaven.

During the French Revolution there was a young man who was condemned to die by guillotine. Many loved him, but only one who loved him more than everyone else combined. He and his son had the same name and when it was called for execution, his father stepped forward answering to his name. It was his father who rode to the guillotine to be executed in his son's place.

Oh, dear folks, that we might know the great love of God who would send His only Son to stand in our place so that when our name was called because we

surely stand condemned, Jesus took our place and because of that great and unsearchable gift of eternal life granted to us by grace through faith our name is no longer on the condemned ledger. How important to know that God showed us how great and unsearchable are the riches of His love that He sent His only Son to die for us (**Romans 5:8**).

The unsearchable riches of His pardon are given to those who repent of their sin. No sin is so bad that His great love and the sacrifice by Christ can't atone.

Lord Jesus, for this I most humbly entreat;  
I wait, blessed Lord, at Your crucified feet.  
By faith, for my cleansing I see Your blood flow -  
Now was me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Lord Jesus, before You I patiently wait;  
Come now, and within me a new heart create.  
To those who have sought You, You never said no -  
Now wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

Whether rich or poor, how wonderful are the unsearchable riches of God that take us beyond our trials as we consider what awaits us in eternity.

His unsearchable riches include His great love for the sinner, His vast pardon for sin and His comfort during all of life's trials. He may not remove the trial, but we are assured of His abiding presence in them which provides great comfort in our affliction, especially knowing that there is nothing now we encounter that can compare with the eternal riches we have in Christ. Our position is secure.

**Romans 8:18** **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”**

Whether you are rich or poor, what is your attitude when you are undergoing trials of various kinds? There may be persecution ahead, can you put things in proper perspective and see that these temporary events are nothing compared to what awaits you in heaven? Your attitude tells a lot about where your treasure and focus lie.