**The Limits of Riches**

**James 1:9-11**

**9**Now the brother *or sister* of humble *circumstances* is to glory in his high position; **10**but the rich person *is to glory* in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. **11**For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so also, the rich person, in the midst of his pursuits, will die out.

**Introduction**

 Good morning. Today as we continue to study the Epistle of James we will be discussing a topic that is very popular in many churches today. When you hear many television evangelists today you will hear them talk a lot about prosperity. If you just sow a seed of giving the Lord will bless you with financial and health prosperity. It seems to many people God has become an ATM who gives them whatever they ask in prayer if they have enough faith to receive it. This theological system is known as The Prosperity Gospel. In our discussion today we are going to learn that having the wisdom of God is of much greater value then any material prosperity we could ever experience.

***1:9 “Now the brother or sister of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;”***

People that are of low or humble stations are to consider themselves special in the eyes of God because they have been made in His image. What we need to be careful of is the fact that just because someone may be poor in this world, that does not mean that they are not blessed by God. One such example of this is Christ Jesus Himself, who lived a very humble and simple life. One time He was told by a potential follower that he would follow Christ wherever He went. The answer this man got from Jesus shocked him so much that he no longer wished to follow Him. Jesus told him in Luke 9:58 “’The foxes have holes and the birds of the sky *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.” What we learn here is that not even the Son of God had such a great place to sleep as the birds or the foxes. Even though that was the case, this did not mean that Jesus was not God’s Son.

On the other hand, the person who is rich should not think of themselves as being higher elevated or better than the poor, rather they need to remember that they are in the same boat as the rest of humanity. To glory in their humiliation is to remain humble in their position, which is the same as the rest of humanity. Having riches in this life does not help that person to escape the physical death that all of us will eventually face. As we continue in this epistle we will get to the topic of favoritism and the reasons why we cannot and should not treat people better or worse because of their wealth status. This will come later, so stay tuned!

***1:10 “but the rich person is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away.”***

James now addresses those who have been blessed with wealth in this world. He is wanting his readers to understand that the rich do not have any special place in the kingdom of God just because they happen to have wealth. The reminder in this verse is that those who have wealth should not think that having those possessions will make them be able to avoid what all humans face, death. Just like the grass grows and eventually withers, so will those who glory in their wealth.

Jesus spoke regarding wealth several times in His ministry as well as the Apostle Paul. In 1 Timothy 6:10 Paul writes these words to Timothy “For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” The reason why I said that this verse is so often misquoted is because I have heard so many people say that money itself is the root of all evil. What we must be careful of here is not blaming an object as being the cause of evil. Money is an amoral object, meaning that it is neither good nor evil. Kind, loving people can use money to build a hospital for the poor or use their money to help the less fortunate whereas selfish people can take their money and hold onto it refusing to share with others. Having or using money is not evil but loving it more than anything else and doing whatever you have to do to obtain it is the problem Paul is bringing up in this verse.

Jesus also taught about wealth in His sermon on the mount. In Matthew 6:19-21 we read **19**“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. **20**But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; **21**for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” If all that we love is wealth and riches then our reward will only be more of those riches and not the reward of being in God’s presence for all of eternity. The future glory we will experience with Christ will be so beautiful that these earthly treasures we want so badly will seem like rubbish in comparison. Let us keep this in mind as we think about wealth and riches.

Another point we need to make is that riches and wealth do not stop the trials from coming in this life. What I have noticed is that those who have lots of money still seem to suffer heartache in this life just like those from poorer circumstances do. Relying on that wealth as being protection from trials is an empty pursuit. Money will not rescue us from the trials of life, nor should we expect this to be so. How many of you have ever heard of a TV Show titled “How Winning the Lottery Changed My Life?” This show focused on how people had their lives turned upside down when they won the lottery. Several times the people would make the statement that they really wished they had not won the money because now they were constantly being hounded for money by both their families as well as complete strangers. Rather than winning all that money making their lives better, it made their lives miserable. This proves the point that riches and wealth are not automatically going to make all the problems of this world go away.

***1:11 “For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so also, the rich person, in the midst of his pursuits, will die out.”***

In our final verse today, James uses the illustration of grass and flowers. The sun scorches and burns those plants making then eventually die. We need to remember that all of us, despite what possessions we may have, will eventually die. Years ago, I remember seeing a bumper sticker on a car that said “He who dies with the most toys wins.” What I think is so interesting regarding that slogan is that it never told me what they won? If having everything on this earth is the goal and you cannot take it with you when you die, then what is the point in having all those things? James wants his readers to know that glorying in earthly possessions will get us nowhere, so we should not worry about accumulating more of that stuff.

The verse ends by saying that if the wealthy only pursue more wealth that will lead to death. Therefore, pursuing wealth is an empty pursuit. So, this leads us to the pinnacle question of our study today, what should we be pursuing? To answer this question, I would like to go to the Sermon on the Mount once again. Towards the end of the sermon Jesus says these words: “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear for clothing?’ **32**For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. **33**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you” (Matthew 6:31-33). So, rather than be concerned only with our earthly needs and the things that will eventually fade away, our real concern needs to be on seeking the will of the Lord, knowing His Word and faithfully sharing that knowledge with others we know. Doing these things show that we are disciples of Christ and want others to know the truth that can set them free from the worries and concerns of this world.

How can having this knowledge help us when we face the time of trial? If we have the proper perspective in mind then we will not be so focused on how bad out situation is, but we will be more concerned with the needs of others and the expansion of the Kingdom of God on this earth. Rather than looking inside and feeling sorry about how tough things are for us, we need to be thinking of others first. When we do this then we will receive multiple blessings because having others around us during those trials is what gives us the strength to keep pressing on. Only through the wisdom of the Lord, which we can receive studying His Word, in the community of faith in the church, and though prayer and thanksgiving can we face the trials of this world with confidence and blessed assurance. Our Lord is walking though these trials with us, and He understands what we are going through. Let us not rest in our possessions or in the riches we have on this earth, let us focus on the blessings God gives us in His Word and the brotherhood we have the joy of experiencing in the church family. It is those blessings that will help us to weather the storms of life and prepare us for the ultimate joy of being in the presence of our Savior Christ Jesus for all of eternity.

**The Prosperity Gospel: A False Gospel**

I am certain that most of you are familiar with a division of the Christian faith today known as the health and wealth gospel, it is also referred to by many as the Prosperity Gospel. In case you are not familiar with this let me take a moment to introduce you to this view. According to Ligonier Ministries “The prosperity gospel is one of the most prominent false teaching movements of our day. Prosperity gospel preachers and televangelists have deceived multitudes around the world with a false gospel, teaching that individuals who exercise true faith in Christ will surely attain physical, material, and financial prosperity in this life.” The primary interpretation of Scripture according to this view is that God has worked through the pages of Scripture to bring not only eternal salvation to mankind, but to also provide all physical as well as financial well-being to those who follow Him. The primary reason to be a believer in God, according to this view, is to obtain a better life in this present world.

The four essential beliefs of Prosperity Theology are:

1. Jesus died to bring us physical, financial, and spiritual healing. When someone becomes a Christian they should expect to have all sicknesses healed, have financial success, and never face tough times in this life. Considering what we have already discussed in the Epistle of James, what problems are there with this view?

Scripture teaches that God calls people to come to Christ for the **forgiveness of sins**. Therefore, the goal is not to obtain material blessing, but rather spiritual renewal and forgiveness of sins so that we may spend eternity with our Creator. If our only focus is on this life now, what do we really have to look forward to?

1. Material prosperity: “If a person believes in Jesus, he will inherit great possessions and tangible blessings in this life.” At any point in the ministry of Jesus did He teach that following Him would result in material prosperity?

The promise of God is that the Messiah will come to bring everyone who calls upon His name into a saving relationship with Him. We cannot take the things of this world with us when we leave this life, so what ultimate value do they have?

1. “Prosperity gospel preachers teach their followers that the way to gain riches is to give more money to the kingdom, especially by giving to their churches and ministries.” In other words, the more you give to the church the more you should expect to receive from God in financial blessing. Many times, you will hear a preacher use such a term as “sowing a seed” to reap blessings.

God asks people to give so that the work of the kingdom may flourish. We give back to the God who has given us so much! Therefore, giving for the work of the kingdom is out of appreciation and reverence for God who has blessed us with this beautiful Creation and has given us the gift of life.

1. Prayer takes on a whole new meaning and function: “If someone exercises enough faith, he will no longer have to be subject to the crippling effects of sickness and disease. If individuals continue to suffer afflictions or poverty, it is due to their lack of personal faith.”

God promises complete healing for individuals only in the resurrection on the last day. We cannot and should not expect that everything in this sin filled world will be perfect. Man’s rebellion against God came with consequences. We must take the words of the Apostle John seriously when he writes that in heaven there will be no tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain (Revelation 21:4). Our healing and restoration will take place in the life to come. Even though we may suffer pain and difficulty here on this earth, God has promised us healing and the perfect existence He originally created mankind to experience from the beginning.

**Conclusion quote from John MacArthur:**

“The loss of material things is meant to drive the rich person to the Lord and to greater spiritual maturity, blessing, and satisfaction. And to that point, the rich and poor are exactly alike. Neither material possessions nor lack of them is of any ultimate consequence. **What is of significance is a trusting relationship to the Lord, who showers all of His children with spiritual wealth that will never diminish or fail to satisfy.**”