

The Great Reversal  
James 1:9-11  
ABC 2/3/19

A *paradox* has been defined as *a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality expresses a possible truth*.<sup>1</sup> For example, *giving is receiving*. The Bible has many paradoxes, telling us the weak are strong, the empty are full, the slave is free, the cursed are blessed, & that death brings life. All are statements which sound contradictory, but become increasingly true as we think on them. GK Chesterton said a paradox *is truth standing on its head shouting for attention*. Today in Js 1:9-11 we have the paradox of the rich poor & the poor rich. James is giving us some tests of true faith. As we've seen, true faith has joy even in trials (1:2-4). True faith seeks God for wisdom in such times (1:5-8) & here in vss 9-12 James shows us that true faith adopts God's perspective regarding poverty & riches. To put it another way, to wisely persevere in trials with joy, adopt God's eternal perspective on poverty & riches. There's a contrast here between the permanent & the perishable. Until we live in light of this distinction, we won't handle trials or persecution very well. If we get caught up with the world's pursuit of wealth as the key to happiness, we'll miss God's way of blessing, which centers on eternal riches that can't be taken from us. 1<sup>st</sup>, James speaks to the poor Christian (1:9); then, to the rich (1:10-11); &, finally, he offers hope to all who persevere under trials (1:12).

There are a lot of people who have a unspoken belief that because they're Christians, bad things might happen to them, but nothing really bad. That's not what the Bible teaches. What's the great proof against that whole idea? It's Jesus. If you look at Jesus, you see He suffered greatly. He suffered relationally. He was betrayed & abandoned. He was alone. He was isolated. He suffered injustice on the part of the authorities. He suffered a trial which was a travesty of justice. He was beaten, scourged, & killed. Somebody says, *Yeah, but he was Jesus, right? Right. Well, I'm not Jesus. Right. Therefore...* Therefore what? Therefore, the universe owes you a better life than Jesus? As has been said, *Jesus suffered not that we might not suffer, but that in our suffering we might*

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<sup>1</sup> www.dictionary.com

*become like Him*. There's no immunity for Christians in suffering & trials. We should expect them.

## 2-12 PRAY

James gives us a paradox that levels the playing field between the rich & the poor in the church. He says the poor are rich & the rich are poor. He's not supporting some kind of redistribution of wealth, but he shows that in the church, the world's distinctions (status for the rich & insignificance for the poor) don't hold true. Also, contrary to the popular heresy, James doesn't say the poor brother is to claim his Cadillac by faith. The *name it & claim it* or *health & wealth* heresy is a perversion of God's Word that uses false promises to appeal to the greed of its victims.

The theme of the rich & the poor is woven throughout James (1:9-11; 2:1-7, 15-16; 5:1-6). He draws on the teaching both of the OT & of Jesus. James brings together these 3 elements:<sup>2</sup>

1<sup>st</sup>, God has a particular concern for the poor (Ps 68:5; Dt 10:18). Thus James points out (2:5), **Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith...?**

2<sup>nd</sup>, because God has this concern for the poor, We should have the same concern (Dt 10:19). James says one aspect of pure religion is **to visit the orphans & widows in their distress...** (1:27). A profession of faith that ignores the physical needs of a brother is dead faith (2:15-16).

3<sup>rd</sup>, the OT sometimes associates the poor with the humble & righteous & the rich with the wicked oppressor combining the economic with the spiritual (Ps. 10; 37:8-17; 72:2, 4). Jesus did this in the beatitudes, when He said, **Blessed are you who are poor... But woe to you who are rich...** (Lk 6:20, 24). James does the same when he condemns the rich that take advantage of the poor (2:5; 5:1-6). But we can't conclude that the Bible automatically identifies the poor as being righteous & the rich as being wicked. No. The Bible tells of many wealthy men who followed God such as Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, Zaccheus, & others. As well as many poor who followed Him such as the disciples. While not condemning wealth, the Bible does warn about its dangers. The man who desires to get rich falls into a spiritual trap (1 Tim 6:9-10). The rich are often more prone to arrogance & greed (Prov 28:11; 15:27). It's harder for them to see their need for God, because they trust in their money (Prov 11:28). Life seems good, they have no needs, & they ignore the

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<sup>2</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, pp 35-36; & Peter Davids, *Commentary on James*, pp 41-47

obvious fact that riches are of no value when they die (Prov 11:4). The Bible also shows that poverty can be a mixed bag. It may result from ignoring God's ways (Prov 13:8, 18). It can destroy a man (Prov 10:15), his relationships (Prov 19:4, 7), & his independence (Prov 22:7). It can tempt him to steal (Prov 30:7-9). But, poor people often have integrity & humility, which the rich often lack (Prov 19:1; 28:6, 11). Commenting on Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> beatitude, **Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God** (Lk 6:20), Leon Morris states that Jesus...

*...is not blessing poverty in itself: that can as easily be a curse as a blessing. It is His disciples of whom Jesus is speaking. They are poor & they know that they are without resource. They rely on God & they must rely on Him, for they have nothing of their own on which to rely.... The rich of this world often are self-reliant. Not so the poor.*<sup>3</sup>

So poverty can be an advantage over wealth if it shows a person his need for God, who pours out spiritual blessings on all who call upon Him.

### 1. The Rich Poor 9

The **brother of humble circumstances** literally reads, *the brother, the lowly*,<sup>4</sup> & his **high position** correspondingly reads, *in his height*. So we can translate it, *The lowly brother ought to boast in his height!* The low are high! Who are the low? The context suggest they are poverty-stricken Jewish Christians who were poor because of their faith. & because they were economically low, they were low in the eyes of the world &, perhaps, low in their own eyes. Their poverty produced a lowliness of mind. James directs the poor man to glory in his high position, which refers to his spiritual wealth in Christ. When a poor man trusts in Christ as Savior & Lord, he instantly becomes the heir of a vast fortune. He's a child of the King of kings, with access to all of the King's resources. Paul pictures the believer as seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). He repeatedly refers to believers as being **in Christ**, which means that everything that's true of Christ is true of us. He tells the Corinthians, **all things belong to you, whether ... the world or life or death or things present or things to come...** (1 Cor 3:21, 22). He tells us that if we are children of God, then we are **heirs also, heirs of God & fellow heirs with Christ** (Rom 8:17). The poor Christian is truly rich & James tells

<sup>3</sup> Luke, p 127

<sup>4</sup> G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Lexicon of the NT*, p 439

the poor believer to glory in these precious truths. The lowly must not only understand this, but must also see that a mighty reversal is coming in which the low will be made high & the high low.

It's said that a general once sat at a table in a royal court, seated beside the court chaplain. In the course of the meal the general turned to the chaplain &, to make conversation, asked, *Pastor, in this moment together here, could you tell me something about Heaven?* The court chaplain looked at him carefully & said, *Well, yes, I could. The first thing I would tell you, general, is that in Heaven you will not be a general.*<sup>5</sup>

James is so sure of the grand reversal, & so sure that the low will become high, that he encourages the humble brother to boast in his height. This is to be a joyous boasting. Paul uses the same word in Rom 5:2 speaking of rejoicing in the hope of glory & in 5:11 to refer to rejoicing in reconciliation. Here James orders the lowly to paradoxically & cheerfully boast in their height.

Obviously, we aren't to boast in anything in ourselves. The Corinthians were boasting in themselves & Paul rebuked them, saying, **What do you have that you did not receive? & if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?** (1 Cor 4:7). If all that we have is because of God's unmerited favor, then why do we exalt ourselves, as if it came from us? The concept of *self-esteem* that's flooded our culture & crept into the church comes from the world's wisdom, not from God's Word. Christ did not die for you or me because we were worthy! Quite the opposite, He died for us **while we were yet sinners** (Rom 5:8). So we must *boast* or **glory** in the Lord, to bring glory to Him. As Paul argues, God has chosen us who are foolish, weak, & despised in the eyes of the world **so that no man may boast before God**. He goes on to say, **But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus... so that, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord'** (1 Cor 1:26-31). If we're saved because of our choice, we have grounds for boasting. *I chose God because I'm so smart!* But if salvation is totally from God, beginning with His sovereign choice of me, then all I can do is **glory** or *boast* in the Lord (cf Gal 6:14).

James stands deep spiritual truth on its head & shouts that Christians are the rich poor, the low high, & paradoxically commands that the brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position. He may be considered **the scum of the world, the dregs of all things** (1 Cor 4:13) in the eyes of the world, but in God's eyes he's exalted. He may be hungry, but he has the bread

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<sup>5</sup> Manford George Gutzke, *Plain Talk on James*, p 35

of life. He may be thirsty, but he has the water of life. He may be poor, but he has eternal riches. He may be cast aside by men, but he's been eternally received by God. He may have no home on earth, but he has a glorious spot in heaven. When God, in His wisdom & sovereignty, takes away physical possessions from some of His children, it's for the purpose of making them spiritually mature, a blessing infinitely more valuable than anything they've lost or have wanted but never had. The believer who's deprived in this life can accept that temporary & insignificant deprivation because he has a future divine inheritance that is both eternal & secure.

The world would no doubt mock James' advice at this point. *What good is it to tell a poor man to glory in his spiritual riches in Christ? He's still living in a shack. He still wears ragged clothes. He still goes hungry. His children are still barefoot & lack medical care. What good are these spiritual riches to this man?* But that view comes from a materialistic mindset & ignores the fact that the basic need of every human heart is spiritual, not material. James will go on to say that true faith will supply a poor brother with the basic necessities of life (2:15-16). But Paul says, **If we have food & covering, with these we shall be content** (1 Tim 6:8). The Bible calls us to believe that our spiritual riches in Christ are reality, whereas material riches are a vapor that evaporates before our eyes.

## **2. The Poor Rich 10-11**

Figuring out whether the **rich man** here is a believer or an unbeliever is difficult. Commentators are evenly divided. If it refers to a rich unbeliever, then vs 10 is using irony or sarcasm, saying, *Let the rich man glory in the fact that he's going to be pushing up daisies one day!* He'll still be pursuing wealth when, just like wildflowers, he'll fade away. In this view, the withering & fading of the flower is a reference to final judgment. That view has many arguments in its favor, but I lean toward the view that James is referring here to rich believers. He mentions rich men coming into their assembly (2:2) & those who travel in business & boast about their plans to make a profit (4:13-16). In this view, his teaching views both poverty & wealth as tests of faith (1:12). The poor man is tempted by his poverty to devote himself to the pursuit of wealth. Or, he may be tempted to feel neglected by God because of his poverty. James tells him, rather, to focus on his spiritual riches in Christ. The **rich man** is tempted to glory in his wealth & the status & power that come from financial

success. James tells him to glory, rather, in his humiliation as a believer. His wealth doesn't put him on a higher spiritual rung than the poor believer. His wealth relates only to this fleeting life. He & his money will soon fade away. As an Italian proverb puts it: *When the game is over, the king & the pawn go back into the same box.* The rich man's homes, portfolio, & toys won't mean anything when he's in the grave. Yet, those with great wealth tend to regard what they have as eternal. They live under the illusion that their riches will go on forever. They won't!

In our culture, we think of the rich as privileged, but Jesus taught they're underprivileged spiritually. That's the indisputable point of the story of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life (Mk 10:17). It's difficult for the rich to present themselves as humble beggars before God. Our rich culture is, therefore, disadvantaged & underprivileged. But what about rich Christians, the small minority who in James' day hadn't suffered poverty? Did their wealth present a problem? Of course it did, just as it does for rich Christians today. Material wealth lures us to focus our attention on things. Jesus warned against **the deceitfulness of wealth**, which strangles spiritual life (Mt 13:22). Jesus also categorically said, **You cannot serve both God & Money** (Mt 6:24). The rich Christian mustn't follow the world by glorying in his riches. Rather, he must **glory in his humiliation**. What does that mean? The idea is that a believer who is materially well-off, healthy, & otherwise physically blessed should rejoice when trials come, for they teach him the transitory nature of those material things & their inability to give inner & lasting satisfaction or help, especially spiritual help. The rich Christian is to cultivate the poverty of spirit he experienced when he came to Christ. He's to work at this lowliness, focus on it, & make it his boast.

Most of us think this applies to people like Phil Knight, Donald Trump, Bill Gates, Warren Buffett, Jeff Bezos, & those type of guys. We all tend to identify with the poor in this passage. But by the world's standards, most of us qualify as **rich**. I did a quick search on the internet<sup>6</sup> & found if you make \$10,000/year you are richer than 84% of the people in the world. Make \$25k? You're richer than 98% of the world's population. See where this is going? If you make \$50k you're richer than

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.globalrichlist.com/>

99.7% of the earth's people. Make \$100,000? What do you think? You are richer than 99.92% of all people on earth. You are roughly the 5 millionth richest person on earth. All this to say that we need to apply vs 10-11 to ourselves! How can we **glory in our humiliation?**

1<sup>st</sup>, we can glory in the fact that God has opened our eyes to see the vanity of worldly wealth & status. To live to accumulate the world's junk & to strive after the world's approval is useless! Right after the evening news, a program about all of the rich & famous in Hollywood comes on. All of these celebrities are stuck on their own glamour & fame. Many viewers probably think, *That's the kind of life I want to have!* Christians ought to think, *How tragic! These people are living for vanity!*

2<sup>nd</sup>, we can glory in the fact that God has shown us the essence of true life & joy. True joy is to know God. True life is to be a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. As God says in Jeremiah,

**Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, & let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands & knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice & righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things (Jer 9:23-24).**

3<sup>rd</sup>, we can glory in the fact that we have an eternal inheritance that will never be taken from us. Ps 49 mocks the rich man, who congratulates himself, naming his lands after himself, & thinks his fame will endure forever. It says, bluntly, **But man in his pomp will not endure; he is like the beasts that perish, This is the way of those who are foolish (12-13).** But believers have **an inheritance which is imperishable & undefiled & will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us (1 Pt 1:4).**

John Flavel, an old Puritan writer who wrote in the 1600s, wrote a book called *Keeping the Heart*. In it he has a list of 12 situations that are spiritually dangerous. During these situations he says one must be diligent to keep the heart. Do you know what the #1 trial is? Prosperity. In other words, the Bible teaches, James is teaching, the greatest trouble is to have no trouble. The greatest spiritual trial is to have no trial. The greatest spiritual danger is a lack of danger. Saint Bernard put it this way: *To see a man humble under prosperity is the greatest rarity in the world.*<sup>7</sup> James then adds an illustration & says, *The one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he*

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/662778>

*will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat & withers the plant; its blossom falls & its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.* This is also true for the poor man, but James applies it to the rich because he is more apt to think his wealth is eternal. The rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business (cf 4:14). His life will be like a parched dandelion in a sudden gust of wind. Poof & it's gone.

Or think of it this way: When you lose a loved one, wealth is no comfort. When you lose your health, are betrayed by a friend, or are wrongfully slandered, money cannot buy peace of mind or decrease the pain. Trials are the great equalizer, bringing all of God's children to dependence on Him. Wealth doesn't bring God closer, nor does poverty keep Him further away. In light of that truth & this text, the beautiful passage from Hebrews could be modified: **Therefore let us draw near with equal confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may equally receive mercy & equally find grace to help in time of need** (Heb 4:16; cf Phil 4:19).

Faith in Christ to supply his needs lifts the lowly believer beyond his trials to the great height of a position in the eternal kingdom of Christ, where, as God's child, he's rich & may rejoice & boast. Faith in Christ does an equally blessed thing for the rich believer, whose riches are temporary; it fills him with the spirit of lowliness & true humility. As the poor brother forgets all his earthly poverty, so the rich brother forgets all his earthly riches. The two are equals by faith in Christ.

Trials were introduced in vss 2-4 & James will return to them in vs 12. So, it seems that James intends us to see poverty & riches as a, or perhaps even THE, greatest test for Christians. But these vss might also be tied to James' overriding concern throughout this section that Christians would display a consistent spirituality that avoids the **double-minded** attitude typical of too many who claim to be followers of Christ. Money & the things that money can buy are a tremendously powerful lure to compromise our whole-hearted commitment to God. & so his thoughts flow from the need to approach God with a consistent & unwavering faith (6-8) to one of the chief threats to that kind of faith. As Jesus warned, **No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one &**



love the other, or he will be devoted to one & despise the other. You cannot serve God & wealth (Mt 6:24).

In our day & age, it didn't happen unless it's documented & posted online for all to view & like & comment on. If nobody sees, it didn't really happen. In other words, what's real does depends on who's watching.

We all know Joni Eareckson Tada's story. When she was a teenager she had a diving accident & has been a quadriplegic ever since. In her book *A Step Further* she tells about her roommate in rehab, a Christian named Denise Walters. Denise Walters was a teenage cheerleader, about the same age as Joni. She was a senior in high school, popular & happy, her whole life was in front of her. One day, she stumbled on the stairs between classes & fell down & didn't understand why, but her feet just didn't seem to be working right. By the end of the day, her legs were so numb she could hardly walk. She went home, took a nap, & when she awoke she was paralyzed from the waist down. Within hours, her arms were. Within 2 weeks, she was blind. What was happening was a rare, super-accelerated case of multiple sclerosis. She was in that hospital with Joni. At first, everybody came to visit but it soon dwindled. After a while, nobody was watching. Nobody came, just her mother. Denise never complained. She always trusted, always said, *I know God has some reason here*. She kept her heart on Him & kept her faith. After a couple years of this, she died. Joni struggled trying to figure this out. She said, *What good could have come out of that?* Because absolutely, even if she had been this great model of faith, nobody was watching. Then one day, Joni was sitting around with some Christian friends & they were trying to brainstorm what in the world was going on. Then they realized a number of things. In Lk 15:10, Jesus says, **I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.** Eph 3:10 told them that the powers & principalities, the spirit world, have eyes on the church. & in Heb 4:13 they learned that **nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered & laid bare before the eyes of him to** (NIV). Joni & her friends came to realize what you do in your heart, whether you're faithful or unfaithful, everything is watched. This is the Christian worldview. God Himself sees. Not just everything you do but even your heart & your thinking as well. What if tomorrow everything

you did & everything you said & everything you thought was seen by everyone around the world? Would it make a difference in how you lived? Would it make everything you did significant? Don't you realize something bigger than that is true? It's what you do for God that lasts forever, **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial** (12). He's the one who will get the crown! Somebody's watching. The things you do for God are the only things that really last. The great thing about trials & troubles, whether poverty or prosperity, is to make us more like Jesus. The things we do for Him, the character we develop, our love for Him & others, His wisdom being lived out in us, will last forever. It won't fade.

Let me close by asking you, what is important to you? What do you boast about? What do you take pride in? Where do you look for your deepest, most meaningful satisfaction? Is what is truly important, important to you? James wants us to know that life is a vapor (4:14). We're all going to die soon. To focus on accumulating wealth if we lack it or to expend ourselves in amassing more wealth than we already have, would be shortsighted. Rather, we should focus on the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him (12). That eternal focus will enable us to persevere in trials with joy. PRAY COMMUNION

In 1944, 8-year-old Tony Foulds was in the park in Sheffield, England with some other boys from another school who were looking to fight. A B-17 Flying Fortress named *Mi Amigo* circled the park & the boys thought those on the plane were waving to them.<sup>8</sup> They were actually looking for a safe place to crash land & to wave the boys to get out of the way. The pilot chose to crash into a tree-covered hill instead of the field the boys were in & all 10 men onboard were killed. Tony is now in his 80s & regularly tends the memorial for those men. Cassie Watson writes,

*It's impossible to know what happened on that plane in the minutes before the crash—whether the pilot made the decision to avoid the children, or if all the men had time to discuss & agree together.*

*But whatever the case, I'm in awe of this remarkable sacrifice from such young men. They were all aged between 21 & 24. One of the gunners had a wife at home who was pregnant with their daughter. It hurts to see a photo of the group—they were real, living & breathing, but never grew any older.*

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<sup>8</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/22/ww2-plane-crash-memorial-honoured-fly-past-pensioner-sparked/](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/01/22/ww2-plane-crash-memorial-honoured-fly-past-pensioner-sparked/)

*Despite living with Parkinson's disease for over two decades, Tony is determined to continue honouring the memory of these men. As Christians, I think we have a lot to learn from him. He knows the names of all the servicemen, & says, "I owe them my life. Their sacrifice gave me everything. I love them as much as my own children."*

*Tony is not to blame, yet he still feels responsible for their deaths. He shows his gratitude through constant remembrance. When asked how often he thinks about their sacrifice, Tony replied: "Everyday, every single day...."*

*Although I don't owe my life to ten young servicemen, I do have a remarkable Saviour. These valiant men are rightly honoured for giving their lives to save unknown children. But Jesus gave His life to save wicked rebels who hated Him.*

**Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, & being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil 2:5-8).**

**For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:6-8).**

*God Himself came to earth as a Man & died for my sins. Does my gratitude for this sacrifice affect my life as much as the servicemen's sacrifice affects Tony? He maintains a memorial as a token of his grief & gratitude. Do I live as a perpetual memorial to Jesus? Do I, like Tony, think about this sacrifice every day?*

*We don't need to keep a physical memorial to Jesus. After all, He rose from the dead to rule as King of the world. He is gloriously alive! We rejoice, knowing that we will soon go to be with Him forever. But our hearts should constantly cherish the memory of what our Saviour has done.*

*Tony Foulds carefully preserves the plaque etched with the names that are also graven on his heart: John, Lyle, John, Melchor, Harry, Charles, Robert, Vito, Malcolm, & Maurice.*

*May the name of Jesus be graven on all our hearts, for all our days.<sup>9</sup> PRAY*

Today we again remember the sacrifice that was made for us by Jesus. He Himself has given us this memorial, eating of bread & drinking of wine, to remember Him & His death for us. Jesus said, **This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me (1 Cor 11:24)**. Let's eat of the bread remembering Jesus' sacrifice for us.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://casswatson.com/a-living-memorial/>

**This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me (1 Cor 11:25). Let's drink together remembering Jesus' sacrifice for us.**

(On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of this month, 75 years after the crash of the *Mi Amigo*, there will be a flyby over the park to commemorate their deaths.<sup>10</sup>)

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<sup>10</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-46958696](http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-south-yorkshire-46958696)

He continues,

**3. The Eternally Rich** James crowns his discussion with a beatitude promising eternal life. **12**

Vs 12 goes back to the opening theme of 1:2-4. **Trial** occurs in 1:2 & 12. **Joy** (2) & **blessing** (12) are related. **Blessed** means happy, but it means more than happy. Happiness is a more momentary emotion, whereas blessedness refers to a lasting condition that undergirds momentary sorrow or sadness. **Persevere** (12) goes back to the same word in vss 3-4. & **been approved** (1:12) is related to **testing** in 1:3. It has the idea of being tested & passing the test, so that God's stamp of approval is on your life. Quickly, 4 truths from vs 12.

**A. BOTH POVERTY & RICHES ARE TESTS OF FAITH.** Greed is not the exclusive temptation of the rich.

The poor man can be just as greedy & materialistic as the wealthy man. The poor often covet what the rich already have. But if the focus of both groups is on getting more money or possessions as the way to true happiness, they don't have God's perspective.

Both rich & poor are prone to pride. The poor Christian can become proud over how poor he is for the sake of the kingdom, & thus boast in being more spiritual than the rich. The rich can be proud over how God has blessed them & given them influence. Both need to develop the humility that comes from bowing before God's grace.

Some may say, like Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, *If riches are a test or trial, smite me with it!* Paul warns that the desire for riches has plunged many into ruin & destruction, causing them to wander away from the faith (1 Tim 6:9-10). The test of riches is that it feeds our greed & gets our focus on this world. To pass the test, we must glory in our humiliation.

**B. THE WAY OF TRUE BLESSING ISN'T TO BE EXEMPT FROM TRIALS, BUT TO PERSEVERE UNDER**

**THEM.** James doesn't say, *Blessed is the man who never goes through trials*. Nor does he say, *Blessed is the rich man*. Rather, **Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial**. Testing has a way of leveling the rich & the poor. It helps all of us to get our focus on the right things, namely, eternal things.

The wealthy Kennedy clan has had so much tragedy hit them that you would think that those that remain would repent & believe on Christ. They have gone through assassinations, cancer, divorces,

serious scandals involving the law, sudden deaths through plane crashes, & more. You would think that they could see that worldly riches are worthless in light of eternity!

It's only when we believe in Christ & adopt God's eternal perspective that we can persevere under trials with the joy of salvation.

**C. THE CROWN OF LIFE IS GOD'S REWARD FOR THOSE WHO PERSEVERE UNDER TRIALS.** The man who perseveres under trials is blessed in this life but James' emphasis here is on the rewards of heaven. The **crown** here refers to the victor's wreath in athletic contests. The picture here is of the believer struggling & striving in the contest, knowing the reward of the crown awaits him at the end if he perseveres. The **crown of life** refers to the eternal life that we'll enjoy forever with God. It isn't that we earn eternal life as a reward for our perseverance. Rather, eternal life is God's gift of grace (Jn 5:24; Eph 2:8-9), but we don't enter into the full enjoyment of it until after we have persevered in the race that God has given us to run in this life. **If we endure, we will also reign with Him** (2 Tim 2:12a).

**D. THE STRENGTH TO PERSEVERE UNDER TRIALS COMES FROM LOVE FOR CHRIST.** You might expect James to say, *the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who persevere, or to those who obey, or to those who believe in Him.* But rather, he says, **to those who love Him.** Why does he say this? I think it's because love for Christ keeps us from loving the world. Love for Christ motivates us to persevere under trials. Be sure you realize that love for Christ doesn't exempt you from trials. Rather, it gives us the strength to persevere. Love for Christ is the inevitable result of belief in Him. If we don't love Him, we don't know Him (1 Jn 4:8). When Jesus restored Peter after his denials, He asked him 3x, **Simon, son of John, do you love Me?** (Jn 21:15, 16, 17.) Why? Because love for Jesus is the necessary motivation to serve Him, especially when serving Him causes hardship & persecution. If you're struggling with perseverance in trials, examine the quality of your love for Christ.

The famous evangelist, George Whitefield, once told of seeing some criminals riding in a cart on their way to the gallows. They were arguing about who should sit on the right hand of the cart, with no more concern than children arguing about who sits where in the car.<sup>11</sup> Here were men about to die, arguing over who got the best seat!

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<sup>11</sup> Elisabeth Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man*, p 113