

INTRODUCTION >

INTRO - The Goal of this Life

Illustration: Spending all you have on something that will not last.

What if a friend spent a year saving \$100,000?

They worked extra hours and saved every extra penny.

Then they invited you over to a nice neighborhood and showed you a brand-new plastic toy house they purchased and put together on a new lot of land.

They were so proud, and they bragged about the beauty of their plastic shelter.

VS - a friend who did the same, and spent their savings on a brand-new house.

I assume we would call one a fool and the other very wise for spending a year saving.

The logic of our assessment is a wisdom that says one is **very temporary**, will fall apart, and can not meet the needs of a shelter.

- While the other can, in fact, do all of those things.

The foundational perspective of the entire Bible is that this age is not all there is!

- That a forever reality is dawning.
- And that the plastic power of this moment cannot provide shelter.
- It is not worth your life!

Sacred vs. Secular?

Before we jump in...

We use the word Secular to contrast what is sacred and what is of the world.

- As in Sacred vs. Secular.
- BUT - this is missing the weight and original meaning of the word.
 - Secular - of this epoch, that is, of this age.
- Secular is not simply a contrast to that which is “holy” it is a contrast to that which is eternal.
- So, having a secular mindset means setting your mind on the things that belong only to this present age.

As a reminder, James is writing to the dispersed church.

- Many, if not most, were in difficult financial circumstances as they struggled to settle in foreign lands while facing persecution.

And so James writes this: James 1:9-11

Pray.

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Purpose Statement

Our boast declares our treasure.

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Today, we will look at the following:

1. In Poverty
2. In Much
3. In All Things

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I. IN POVERTY >

VERSE - [9] Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,

The Boasting of the Lowly

Who is the lowly brother?

- The word “brother” is a man or woman who is in Christ, and “lowly” implies humble circumstances.

James is referring to material things.

So, he begins by addressing the Christian living in financial hardship.

But James says this:

Let the Christian in humble circumstances boast in their exaltation.

And that should cause us to pause and say, should we really boast about anything?

When you look up the English word boast, you read: self-satisfaction of your own achievements.

- And that couldn't be further from what James is talking about here, so what is he talking about?

James uses boast the same way Paul often does: That is, a rejoicing in the achievements of another person.

And so see it clearly,

This is not a boast OF their poverty.

This is the boast of believers who **are** in poverty, not **because** they are in poverty.

Does this mean that we should all want to live in poverty?

NO! Just like we don't seek physical suffering or trials!

- If there were something spiritually meritorious about being in poverty, then we would expect other biblical texts to tell us to overlook the poor.
- Why would we want to take away something eternally helpful?

Their Exalted (eternal) Status

So continuing to work through this, James says, let the financially humble boast in their exaltation.

And the “Exaltation” he is referring to is a confidence in something that’s **Not Yet** fulfilled, but **Already** enjoyed.

Putting it all together, James is saying that those who are living in financial poverty should rejoice in the reality of what will be revealed in eternity.

- That is, that they are ALREADY sons and daughters of the Eternal King.
 - That we have an inheritance being kept for us out of the reach of financial downturns and volatile markets.
 - An infinite account of provision and abundance that no thief can break into and steal, and no fraudster can plunder, will be theirs forever.

To Boast Necessitates Trust of a Good God

Illustration: Peculiar Behavior - Kids waking up early and standing outside.

Teens don’t like waking up early. Yet, every morning, when I leave for work, there are a bunch of them standing outside together. Why? Because they have faith that a bus will pick them up. They are not standing on the corner hoping that a large vehicle with a relative stranger will happen to drive by and be going to the place they need to go. Their strange actions of getting up early and standing there declare a truth.

So too for the Christian in lowly circumstances.

James is calling them to a peculiar behavior in this age that will only make sense if there is something more to come.

- If this life is all there is, then they will be like fools waking up early and standing on a corner looking for a bus that will never come, while the rest of the world lies in bed and sleeps in.

BUT if God is Good, if He is not a liar, if Christ did die in their place, and if He rose on the third day, and promised to return, then this is not wishful thinking; it’s a cheque that’s already been written and signed by the One whose Word cannot be erased or overturned.

- This is not a silver lining on a current storm cloud of real hunger, thirst, and need; no, it’s an assurance that every secular lack will be FULLY and FOREVER eclipsed by an eternal abundance.
- It’s a confidence that every table in this age you’re not welcomed to will be seen as a vapor, compared to the Table you’ll feast at forevermore.

- It's an untouchable, undefiled joy that's more sturdy than the concrete you sleep on.
- It's not a consolation prize; it is the Prize that will make all the wealth of this age look like a single obsolete penny in an overinflated economy.
- For those Christians who are in Humble Circumstances, know that you are not simply seen; you are completely known.
 - Every stomach growl and dehydrated headache you suffer will be made untrue in the age that is to come and always be.
 - This moment is secular, and so is its wealth and power; a great reversal is on the way.

This is an element of "The righteous shall live by faith."

It's to LIVE in the secular with faith that there's an eternal age to come.

And in reality, it is SO very near!

Also a Warning

But this word from James is not simply an encouragement to the poor; it's also a warning!

- The danger is that, in our very real need, we begin to believe that our Father in heaven has forgotten or disregarded us.
 - We see our place in this broken world as a direct result of His character.
 - We believe that our financial lack is an unrelenting punishment or condemnation.

Which then leads us to a transfer of our trust to a secular wealth as the answer to our deepest longing.

- And our deepest joy rises and falls with the size of our accounts.

And the false prophets of this age herald a gospel and God that says, your lowly circumstances in this life are a result of your poverty of faith.

- And God is simply waiting for you to muster up enough belief to flood your life with that which is shiny.
- That God's singular intent is your financial prosperity in created things.
- And the lies multiply, and the lowly brother and sister stumble between a God who doesn't care and a personal work of faith that falls short.
- And the lowly brother is tempted to believe that which society has told them, that either their God is not enough, or they are not enough.

(Summary Statement)

So then, James the Brother of Jesus Christ, the brother of the one who didn't even have a place to lay His own head, says this to the lowly:

Rejoice already in the reality of your eternal high place!

Look to Jesus; He lived his life on earth in a very strange way if His hope was in the power of this passing age.

He knew His exaltation would be veiled and even mocked by the powerful of His time in the flesh, but there would be a day when every knee will bow, and tongue confess what they did not trust in the secular.

NOTE: before we move on...

It would be a violence to the text to rip this passage out of the Bible and say, the poor should be content with Christ, so then, therefore, I don't need to, or shouldn't, help alleviate their needs in this age.

Transition:

So then, we move to those who have much in this life.

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II. IN MUCH >

VERSE - [9] Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,[10] and the rich in his **humiliation**, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

AND the Rich

There's a debate whether the "rich" here refers to the world or wealthy believers.

- Based on the arguments, I'm convinced this is referring to believers.
 - Even though this original audience had been dispersed and exiled from their homeland, they had an opportunity to become landowners.

So James addresses the wealthy Christian to boast as well, but this time in their humiliation!

And again, James said to the lowly: **rejoice already in the reality of your eternal high place**

And here to the rich: **rejoice in your complete and utter need for Christ.**

Why?

because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. [11] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

James says, For the sun rises with its scorching heat

- The word for heat can be translated as wind.
- And probably what James was calling their mind's eye to is a scorching wind called the sirocco (SIR O CO), which was likened to the steam of an oven.
- And it would wither grass and topple the flower.
- And it's that image that James is pleading with the well-off to keep in mind.

The rich are to remember that the beauty of silver and gold is secular.

And James is not calling us to a false humility or a surface-level soundbite confession that acknowledges God.

The truth is, Money can buy a lot of things!

- Relative comfort, security, rest, convenience, and on and on.
- Which is why the temptation is so powerful over our hearts!
- Our eyes testify to a fleshy wisdom that declares money as the way and the truth to a full life.

And even if our mouths say one thing, our hearts begin to whisper, who needs God when we have so much power?

- For the right price, you can LOOK immortal.
- If you have enough money, you can buy your way **into** any society or club
 - And conversely, you can buy your way **out** of any trouble as well!
- Everything and everyone has a price.
 - And we pity the poor because it seems they've missed out, while at the same time we envy those in the bracket above us because they have more life than we do.

And this is part of the danger of a mission trip to poor countries.

We go and see, and we think, wow, I have nothing to complain about; I have so much; I should be content.

- My life is better than theirs!
- And yes, we should have compassion, but be careful!
- Because your heart can believe the lie that third world means a third class of life.
- And we can go to sleep thankful we are not them.

And so our joy is not sturdy, and **can only** be found in comparing ourselves to those who have less, and it vaporizes when someone with more walks into the room or moves to our subdivision.

- And we're unstable and double-minded in all our ways.
- As we lay down our lives on the altar of the temporary, consumed by the pursuit of having more.
 - And as James says, we will fade away in those pursuits.

In God we trust?

And if we were to ask, what is the greatest danger to the church in America?

- I am sure we would have a lot to say about woke ideology.
- And hear me, I am not saying we should accept any untruth.
- But the danger is that our headlines are so consumed by these things that we become blind to the idolatry of our hearts.
- It seeps into our homes like carbon monoxide.

And my new license plate declares, In God We Trust, and I'm just not sure that's the case. But no one wants to say, "In money we trust."

And the economy keeps winning elections because money has already won our hearts.

- So Humility is a quaint character trait until it becomes a heresy to the god of our bank account.
 - **And so** a man's boast in himself is tolerable as long as his power protects ours.
 - The ends justify any means necessary to maintain our status quo, but in God we trust?

And it comes in the back door of the church,

- Flourishing is measured by bank statements.
- And the things of eternity become a weekend thought hobby, or a devotional bullet point, while our true power is declared in worldly metrics of success.

And for the church and its people, it usually necessitates our wealth to be tested by a great unexpected cost to remind us of its impotence.

- It is the gracious "If Necessary" trial of 1 Peter 1 that is the fire that refines the true gold of faith and exposes the foil of fortunes.

And I know the implications for an affluent church in an affluent county are not comfortable.

But...if these things are eternally true, then even if they make us squirm, we ought to allow ourselves to be tested by the wisdom of God.

The Rich, Young, Ruler

We see this play out in the story of the Rich Young Ruler in Luke 18.

This man was rich, young, and in power!

He held the three treasures of the secular age!

And we even see that he had a manmade piety of obedience to the laws.

But Jesus explains that he still lacks what he needs to inherit eternal life!

Jesus tells him to give all that he has to the poor.

Not because the giving saves him, but because his idolatry will destroy him.

- Again, the first step into the eternal Kingdom is a spirit of complete poverty, full humiliation.
- And the rich young Ruler becomes very sad, for he was extremely rich; he decided he had too much to give up in this life, and so he refused to lose it.
 - He was not willing to walk away from the god of this age for the God of Eternity.
 - And Jesus goes on to explain that it is very difficult for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God!

Jesus is not condemning the wealthy.

- He is exposing the grave danger of wealth.
- Again, money is not bad, but the love of it is the root system of evil.

Revelation 3:15–19

[15] “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! [16] So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

And then hear the warning of James 1:10 here:

[17] For you say, “I am rich, I have **prospered**, and I need **nothing**,” not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Our finances can blind us to our need!

And maybe we say, but can't I be a wealthy Christian!

Of course!

BUT BE VERY CAREFUL in your pursuits; you may gain the whole world and lose your soul.

And so, James says to the rich Christian: boast in your humiliation, rejoice in your absolute need.

- Realize your wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked!

- And know that God is not simply looking for the confession of need from our lips; He will not be mocked.
- The clothing of our secular garments can blind us and lead us to a lukewarm life of religious activity that protects the god of our material possessions.

And it is in the seeing and knowing of our need that we find the step toward eternal life!
Which leads us to our third and final point.

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III. IN ALL THINGS >

VERSE - Matthew 6:19–21

[19] “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.** (ESV)

The Weight of the Warning

Church, if possible, silence the inner voice screaming for our self-righteousness.

Hear the wisdom of our Good God and His warning.

- See the danger clearly; this is about who we’re worshiping.
- And the devastation lies on both sides: material poverty and prosperity.
- Are we willing to say, Search me, O God, before we declare we are not them?

And I know the older we get, the more responsibilities we have.

- The more that is at stake in the size of our finances.
- And we parents say, we just want to give our kids a good life; is that so wrong?

But the ETERNAL danger is that our pursuit of their good life leads us and them to death.

So then!

If we want Eternal Life for us and the generations to come, what will we do?

A New Love

A few weeks ago I referenced the writing of Thomas Chalmers, who wrote “The Expulsive Power of New Affections.”

The path forward is NOT to simply look at a good thing and say, it’s a bad thing.

Rather, we must look at a good thing like money, and say, you will not become THE thing.

- The size and volume of our boast is tethered to another treasure.
- And we pursue and cherish a new, greater love, which expels the lesser love.

In the story of the Rich Young Ruler, Jesus tells him the way to eternal life is not only to see that which has captured his heart, but also - He needs a new God - and so He says, come to me, follow me!

Make me the new affection, the new treasure of your heart, and the things of this world will grow strangely dim.

And so therefore, with the same zeal that this world pursues the power of money, we pursue the person of Christ.

If we keep reading in Revelation 3, after the warning of their lukewarm worship that was fueled by their prosperity, we see this:

[18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. [19] Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Be reprovved and accept the discipline of your Loving Father!

- Be zealous, repent, and trust not in the powers of this secular age; they will leave us naked and ashamed.
- Turn your affections and trust to Christ, and be clothed in His power and righteousness!

Rejoicing in Christ

And so, for the poor and for the wealthy, we share the same boast!

1 Corinthians 1:28–31

[28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. [30] And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, **“Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”** (ESV)

This is the wisdom of God in Christ Jesus!

The circumstance of every Christian’s rejoicing is their “in Christness.”

- It is **in** their eternal status, and not their secular condition.

The poorest of the poor Christian has a true wealth so great that Forbes could never measure it.

And the richest of the rich Christian declares a need so deep that no humanitarian effort could ever meet.

Our boast is in the Son of God!

He is the power of God for our righteousness.

He is the wisdom of God for our daily lives.

He is more than six months of security; He is our eternal confidence.

He is our unending, untouchable, unmeasurable, incomparable inheritance that will never fade or fail.

And for all those who put their trust in Him, they will not be put to shame.

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CONCLUSION >>>

In Conclusion

So then, how will we leave here today?

Will we leave like the Rich Young Ruler with hearts that are heavy, unwilling to repent of our idolatry?

- What if Christ were standing here today and gave us the same instruction he gave the rich man?
- The question of Christ to our heart's treasure is not meant to destroy us; it is meant to reveal us.
- It is the grace of the trial of fire that is meant to remove the alloys of our worship.

And again, we say, but who can stand before such a test that cuts into our flesh?

- Who can remain whole under such a trial?
- **And I would say none but one!**
 - And so we repent and turn to Christ!

And hear me, I am not asking that everyone give a special offering today to the church.

- And I am not saying you can prove or buy eternal life.
- I am asking everyone to be courageous enough to hear James' warning and Jesus' instruction to the church!
- Will the shame that's hidden in the drywall of our hearts become a mold that destroys the whole house?

Or will we wake?

The day is near when every foundation will be made clear.

When what we find our boast in will be put to the fire and tested for its glory.

In The Hiding Place, the memoir of Corrie Ten Boom, she tells the story of being taken by the Nazis for sheltering Jews.

- And at one point, she and her sister Betsie are in a concentration camp.
- And the place they were sleeping had a flea infestation.
- And the girls were reading through 1 Thessalonians.
- And **1 Thessalonians 5:16–18** they read this:
- **[16] Rejoice always, [17] pray without ceasing, [18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

And this led Betsie to thank God for the fleas!

- Which was a strange thing to be thankful for!
- But Corrie realized that the harsh guards were less likely to enter their area because they didn't want to be bitten by fleas.
- This gave them long periods of time alone to worship God and read a smuggled Bible!
- So! Thank God for the fleas!
- Thank God for the circumstances that lead us to Him!

Church, what causes us to rejoice deeply?

Not a happy thought, not a quick comfort, but what gives you a stabilizing sense of security, hope, confidence for tomorrow?

Is it in our current circumstances?

Or will we trust God and know that He is Good in all things?

And I'd encourage us not to simply leave that thought.

To do work.

And know that if this question strips you, undoes you, and leaves you uncovered and exposed by the truth, that is the first step to a true and better covering!

Jesus our Christ was stripped of everything in our place, and now we wear His righteousness, not to continue to walk in the idolatry of riches, but rather to be transformed.

To become the new creation we have been made to be.

That does not exchange God's eternal worth for the secular worth of finances.

See our wretched hearts, and go to the One who died for them.

He is gentle and lowly - and He alone will give us the rest we all long for.

And then! May we place our boast, our rejoicing in Him in all things!

When we have much or when we have little, we rejoice in all circumstances, for we are the adopted sons and daughters of the God of all Creation!

Pray

Consider

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