

SERMON TITLE: Problems and Perspective

SCRIPTURE: James 1:9-11

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SERIES SUMMARY

In Scripture, we find the life of faith is often a difficult journey. But true faith in Jesus will show itself in tough times and display the reality of Jesus to a watching world. In the same way, we're called to give voice to our words and action to what we believe. This is how our faith can make a transformative difference in our lives and the lives of others. On this side of eternity, a faith not applied is worthless and will make no difference. The book of James regularly asks us to put our faith into action so others can witness the reality of Jesus in our lives. As we turn towards Christ, our faith journey will be purposeful, fruitful, and sustain us through any difficulty we face.

SERMON SUMMARY

Whether you have a little or a lot, what you need most is God's perspective on your money trials.

SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS

We are in the third week of our study through the book of James, so let's start by reviewing what we've learned in the first 8 verses. Four things: (1) The life of faith is a life of difficulty; (2) Only a faith that expresses itself in visible, tangible actions will get you through those difficulties; (3) God uses trial to develop steadfast/standfast faith in us; and (4) If we ask Him, God will give us the wisdom we need to make through the trial stronger in faith (if we ask in faith).

READ 1:9-11 — Immediately, the question is: How do vv9-11 connect with what James just said about trials (vv1-8)? It almost feels like James has changed the subject, but we know he hasn't b/c v2 says—"Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials. And v12 says—"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial..." So, if vv1-8 are about trials and v12 is about trials then everything in between (vv9-11) is also about trials. In other words: v2 and v12 are like bookends to this section on trials and troubles. And that means that vv9-11 is also about trials. But still, at first, it's hard to see the connection. But here's the connection. James is giving us two different examples of how people in two different life-situations experience money trials in different ways. But that's not all. He's also telling us how to handle these trials with wisdom. So, James gives us some much-needed wisdom here. He gives us *God's perspective* on our *money trials*. And specifically, what he tells us is that (1) Whether you have a little or a lot, what you need most is God's perspective on your money trials. These verses are all about perspective. You see, If you fall into *poverty*, that's a trial, that's a test of faith. If you fall into riches and success, that's a trial, that's also a test of faith as well. Every adversity and every prosperity, every difficulty and every success, is a test that can either make you wiser and stronger in your faith, if you handle it properly, or, it can make you more foolish and weaker, if you don't handle it properly. And James gives us two case studies of two different people on opposite ends of the financial spectrum to help see as God sees so we can do as God says.

Verse 9 says—"Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation." This refers to someone living in abject poverty. It refers to someone who is small and insignificant in the world's eyes. But James, playing off what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount says, "Even though you are small and insignificant by this world's standards, by God's standards, you are richly blessed in Christ. So, he says, "Don't belittle yourself. Rather, boast in the Good News that God doesn't see you the way the world sees you. He sees you as one who will reign in the kingdom of God. He sees you as one who will inherit the earth. He sees you as one whose name is written in the Book of Life—as one who has God's very own Spirit living inside them. How much more exalted can you be? He's saying—"Learn to embrace God's perspective on who you are and what you have in Christ, and reject the world's perspective of you (And this is something we have to "learn" cf Phil 4:11).

Verses 10-11 say —"and let the rich boast in his humiliation." The poor are to boast in their high position before the Lord; the rich are to boast in their humble position before the Lord. What does that mean? Simply this, the world looks at successful, prosperous people and attaches a high value to them because of what they've achieved and how much money they have. God says, "No, everyone stands equal before God at the foot of the cross. God says, "I see rich and poor in Christ the same." This makes even more sense when laid against the culture background of the day. Back in the day, there were distinct classes of people: poor/rich, slaves/free, men/women, educated/ignorant—distinct classes—and

these classes never mixed socially. There were lines you just didn't cross, but not in the church of Jesus. The early church was different from every other social institution of the day. There were no class distinctions in the church: men/women, rich/poor, slave/free, educated/uneducated—they all came together as one people, one body—the body of Christ. No one was higher or lower than anyone else. Everyone stood on equal ground at the foot of the Cross. That's the perspective that successful, prosperous people need, and to go against the world's value system, was humbling to those first century well-to-do believers. But there's more here. James talks about how flowers are beautiful but they will quickly wilt and die under the heat of the desert wind. And he compares that to a rich man who hitches his heart to pursuing material goods that will soon pass away. There is wisdom in knowing that all the material things we own will not last. They will fade away. And, if we hitch our hearts to those things, our spiritual life will fade away as well.

Final thought—In God's economy, your identity must never be anchored to how much money you have. Really, this passage is about identity: how you see yourself, how you define yourself, how you are not to let the world define you based on what you have or don't have, and how you are to see yourself as God sees you so you can live as God says.

That is godly wisdom. That is God's perspective when it comes to your status in life. Whether you have a little or a lot, God sees all His children the same because at the foot of the Cross there's no higher or lower. In God's kingdom no one is better than another or worse than another. And that means, your identity must never be anchored to what you have or don't have. So, James is saying, if you have a little, if you feel small and insignificant in the world's eyes—*know this*—Jesus has given you an exalted status. In the Kingdom of Heaven, you are important, in the Kingdom of Heaven, you'll have "riches" that are far beyond anything this life can offer you. So, don't anchor your identity in what you don't have. Your identity is rooted in who God says you are and what God says He's given you in Christ. If you have a lot, if you feel significant and important because you're prosperous—*know this*—your true identity lies not in how much you have—not in your significance in the eyes of the world—but your identity is found in your relationship with Jesus. So, get it in your head that having a lot of material goods does not give you your identity because in the church of Jesus, everyone stands equal before God at the foot of the Cross. And, we are all to boast/rejoice/find our deepest confidence and our deepest satisfaction in the reality of that great truth.

COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

Read James 1:9-11—

Review: Ask the group how they continued to think about what they learned in last week's overview of the "big ideas" of the book of James. Ask if anyone was able to specifically apply something from last week's message during this past week. Remember, James is about "putting our faith into action" so the question is: Since we last met, what opportunities have you had to put your faith into action in some trial or trouble you encountered?

- What does James tell people who don't have much in the eyes of the world to do when they encounter various trials? What are they to "brag" about?
- What does this "bragging" look like in our daily lives?
- What makes it hard to do this when we are struggling with a money trial of some kind?
- What does James tell people who have a lot of material goods to do when they encounter money trials?
- What are they to "brag" about? How is being humbled by the fact that in the church, everyone stands before God on equal ground at the foot of the Cross a good thing?
- The fact is—most of us are in the middle of continuum between great poverty and great prosperity. What does that mean for us?
- How do money trials create an identity crisis in our lives?
- What else? What are some other "ahas" or "take-aways" from our study in James 1:9-11?

The following resources have been a great help to us in preparing messages for this sermon series: *The Letter of James (NICNT)*, by Scot McKnight; *James (ZECNT)*, by Craig Blomberg; Mariam J. Kovalishyn; *The Epistle of James*, by Peter Lange & J.J. Van Oosterzee; *The Letter of James*, by Douglas Moo. Also, I (Charlie) have benefited from the teachings of Tim Keller, Tim Mackie and the Bible Project, and others whom I will credit during my messages. I have adapted and borrowed insights and illustrations from these men and incorporated them into the messages in this series.