

V. James in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel Life According to James
“Gospel Exaltation and Gospel Humiliation”
Book of James
James 1:9-11
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October 6, 2013 – Morning Sermon

We are in our series on the book of James according to James the brother of Jesus. Some of you like to follow along in this series with extra reading and desire to build a good Christian library for yourself and your legacy, the people who come after you and your family. There is a study guide on the book of James by Dane Ortlund. There are two commentaries which are both affordable and very rich. They have greatly helped me. One is James by Daniel Doriani and then James by Kent Hughes. I highly recommend both of them. Finally there is Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering by Tim Keller and this book has been bleeding through my recent sermons. The first part of his book is not easy reading but extremely profitable. It is excellent insight on the issues of evil, suffering, the sovereignty of God and how He works in our life. Now let's start in our study of James. This text is so verbally and theologically stitched together that I'm going to read its context which begins in James 1:2.

James 1:2-8 says [2] *Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, [3] for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. [4] And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. [5] If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. [6] But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. [7] For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; [8] he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*

James 1:9-11 says [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.* The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of our Lord abides forever and by His grace and mercy may it be preached for you.

I want to ask you two questions before I get into this study. Without thinking about what it says in James 1 fill in the blank to this statement. Consider it all joy when... (now you fill in the rest of this statement). Intuitively how would have had filled in that statement? The second question is, what do you think given the trials of life (multi-faceted and inevitable according to James) is the most challenging and dangerous trial of life as a Christ follower that you will face or might face? Very likely, the way you answer this question will be related to the way you filled in the blank to the first statement. I want to try and show that to you in the text that is in front of you.

Here is James who is writing this book of Gospel wisdom. One of the reasons that Martin Luther had some problems with the book of James was because he thought James was supposed to write like Paul did in Romans and Galatians where Paul is laying out how the Gospel is established, what the Gospel is and how you're saved. That is not

what James is doing. James is saying, by stating twenty one times ‘my beloved brothers,’ I’m taking you at your profession of faith that you have a Gospel foundation relationship with God through Jesus Christ who died on the cross to save you from your sins and more than that you also have a Gospel motivation. You love Him because He first loved you, now what I want to give to you is upfront honest language about the Gospel life and what you need to live it. He is giving us a book on Gospel wisdom. The wisdom books of the Old Testament are anticipating the Gospel. This wisdom book, James, is based upon the Gospel and that’s how he lays it out before us.

Here is a thematic statement on the book of James. James is telling us, inspired by the Holy Spirit that the Gospel life is life of persistent ministry and joyful maturation (growing in the grace and knowledge of Christ) in a sin-cursed world (with all of its brokenness) informed by the God-sent gift of “wisdom from above.” The wisdom from above is what God has purchased, promised and gives to His people. So if you’re a believer where you have put your trust in Jesus then you have a Gospel foundation and a Gospel motivation. Now you have this life in a sin-cursed world and what you need is Gospel wisdom as to how to deal the inevitable, multiple, multi-faceted trials that come in this sin-cursed world – what God is doing with them and how you’re to respond to them. So that in the midst of these trials you then persist in ministry and joyfully mature in the Lord.

James then begins to unfold this book with his first of 48 commands. In 108 verses James gives 48 commandments. The first one we call the Gospel maxim number one. Gospel maxim number one is the multi-faceted and inevitable trials of life are designed and sent by the sovereign grace of God to both “prove” and “improve” your Gospel life. It is to prove where you are so that you are steadfast and to improve where you need to be. James says “Consider it all joy my brethren when (not if – it’s inevitable, multi-faceted, multiple) encounter various trials.” Why? It is because you know something. You have Gospel wisdom. You know that a sovereign God has taken the brokenness of the this world and even the temptations of Satan and He has superintended them, He has co-oped them to provide for you a test.

A test always does two things. It reveals what you know and it shows you what you need to know. It establishes what you know, it proves and it shows you what you need to know that you might improve. So the first thing that happens in the life of a believer when they see it rightly, they will *hupermeno*, they will hold on being steadfast. They will super stand. Huper means ‘more than’ and meno means stand. So you will more than stand. That is why he says you’ll be steadfast and not only will you hold ground you start to take ground. That is why the commentators call this an heroic endurance. It is not just a hanging on, but a heroic one. It’s not a passive thing where you’re a victim and you hope it will pass. It is not a stoicism where you just have to grin and bear to get through it. This is not a sadism where you are taking joy in the trial. He knows trials are hard and difficult but you’re informed in what God is doing and what He is sovereignly accomplishing. Therefore He is now building it into an heroic endurance so that you are having its full effect, being completed, perfected and lacking in nothing.

The first blessing of the trial is that you found out you’re lacking something. I’m lacking wisdom. I’m like a child. So then he says that if any lack wisdom then there is great news for God gives it. He gives it generously. He gives it through prayer and He gives it to single-minded believers who are single-mindedly praying. They can’t be

double-minded for that is instability. A double-minded person is looking in two ways – they trust in themselves and it's all about them and yet they say “By the way, God I'd like a little help here. Can you come pick me up?” No! There is no confidence in the flesh. It is impossible with me. Without Him I can do nothing therefore I'm coming single-mindedly. God, first help me understand with a world and life view, how I can stand and take ground. How can this happen? Persist in ministry and grow in grace.

That is why you have to have a Christ-centered, cross shaped mind to have a cross bearing life. You are going to have a cross to bear, multiple ones. Will those become platforms for you to grow, tell people about Jesus and see the hand of God or will we succumb to a worldly view of it of chaos, discouragement and depression? Then I need to look to the cross of my Savior. Now there is one Person who should not have suffered but He suffered for me that I could have life in Him. So with a Christ-centered, cross shaped mind I can have a cross bearing life and begin to interpret and understand the trials of life.

That leads me to, what is the most difficult trial in life? If you and I had been honest in that first statement I asked of “Consider it all joy when...” and we fill in the blank, I think we would have perhaps known what the most difficult trial in life is. Are the smiles and frowns in your life around getting a promotion, a pay raise, your children getting a promotion? What is it that brings to you pure joy? For most of us we operate on the world's metric system which include success, money, power and prestige for that is when we get joyful. We get a frowny face when we don't have the money, applause or prestige. Then we go die in a pile in a pity party.

This James doesn't dodge anything. He says let me tell you why you're in a broken world. Let me tell you about a sovereign God. He doesn't dodge this stuff. Consider it all joy when, not if, you encounter various trials. When James gives us a case study on the trials of life he picks the most dangerous one of all – money and success. It is dangerous when you have it and it's dangerous when you don't have it, if you have the mind of the world. It's not the only dangerous trial and it's not that there aren't other dangerous trials but this is the most lethal trial of all – success, prosperity, the applause of world – because it wraps itself around the idolatry of money. I didn't come up with this.

Jesus came up with this and Peter, Paul and James affirm that and they do it very clearly. Jesus said you can't serve God and mammon. It is harder for a rich man to get into the Kingdom than it is for a camel to go through an eye of a needle. The disciples answered Him and said “You mean a rich man can't get into the Kingdom? Then who can be saved?” Do you see how they are thinking? A rich man must be closer to the Kingdom for he has the access. No, you can't buy your salvation or your kid's salvation. You just can't do it and all the stuff you have now can't go with you when you die. Just like the preacher said “I've done a lot of funerals and I've never seen a U-Haul attached to the hearse yet.” You come in with nothing and you go out with nothing. The question you need to ask yourself is not how much or how little you have while you were here but how much of you did it have? And Jesus tells us that.

James affirms this when he says let me give you the toughest case study of all. If you don't have it, what the world applauds, or if you do have it, what the world applauds. So he gives us a riddle and then a parable to illustrate it. Let's first look at the riddle by looking back at James 1:9 which says [9] *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation...* Who are we talking about? It's a brother. We are talking about someone who is

professing their faith in Christ. They know Christ as their Lord and Savior who died on the cross. They want to love and serve the Lord. Now, they have a trial in life and they are lowly. Who said they are lowly? The world says they are lowly and you are lowly because you don't measure up. You don't have prestige, success, our applause, our wealth, therefore you are lowly. That is what the world says to this brother.

What does Gospel wisdom tell that brother to say in that trial of life? Gospel wisdom says 'boast.' Doesn't the Bible say "Let him who boast, boast in the Lord"? He is not contradicting for that is actually what he is using here. Let him who doesn't have what the world boasts of, when they declare him lowly with their metric system, you have another metric system. Your metric system is the Gospel and in the Gospel you now boast in the Lord whom you are in and whom is in you. You have been exalted to the throne of God. When He ascended you ascended. You are at the right hand of the Father. You are a joint heir with Jesus Christ so your boast is in the Lord. You are lowly but you're boasting. Do you see how the riddle gives us Gospel wisdom?

What about the brother who is esteemed, rich in the world? What should that brother do? He should boast also but what he boasts in is not what the world is boasting in. He boasts in the Lord which means he boasts first to the world saying "I am nothing." He boasts in his humiliation. The world tells the poor man you are nothing. The poor man says "In your eyes that is true but in the eyes of Jesus I've been redeemed, saved and I'm a trophy of grace." The world tells the rich man "Boy you're something. Can I put you on my tweet? Would you like my Facebook page? Could I interview you as to how you got so successful? We just think you're wonderful." Here is what you boast in. The Lord is your life therefore you boast by saying "You've got it wrong for I am what I am by the grace of God. There is nothing that I have that I did not receive from Him." Your boast is in the Lord. Then he gives a parable to illustrate it.

James 1:10-11 says *[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.* He is quoting from Isaiah 40 here. The rich man is like a man in the scorching heat of summer. Everything that was beautiful and flowering just a few weeks ago is now melting and wilting in front of your eyes.

The wind he is referring to here is the Sirocco wind in the Middle East. In the midst of summer when the sun is beating down in the Middle East and a breeze comes it's a hot one, not a cool one. When I was growing up in the South whenever a breeze came in the summer I was glad for it. When the Sirocco comes you don't put your arms out. You try to cover up because that wind is coming from the desert and it's not a refreshing breeze, it's an oven blast and what isn't dead yet is soon to be in the dust of death. It is soon to be consumed. When it blows it leaves nothing behind. The flower fades, the grass withers and so is the rich man right in the midst of pursuing everything that he wants. It's now gone and so he is warning the believer not to get trapped into this idolatry of man's applause, riches and prosperity because if you do it will ruin your family and bring death.

How many believing men have lost their family because they fell into the snare of the idolatry of success and they just didn't have time for them? How many preachers have lost their ministries and how many people haven't come to Christ because they think the idolatry of the wealth of this world is actually what will make their life? This fading

away is a two edged sword. It is looking at believers who get ensnared by this siren call of wealth, success and prosperity. We have preachers who manufacture the Gospel as an instrument of wealth, prosperity and applause of the world. It can ruin you when that becomes the direction of your life and certainly when you have prostituted the cross to think that Jesus died on the cross so you could be healthy and wealthy.

God may have entrusted a lot of money to you but I do know you don't have to be poor to be a Christian. When people ask me 'do you have to be poor to be a Christian?' I tell them 'yes and no.' You have to be poor in (your) self and rich in Christ. You don't have to be poor in the world for the Lord may or may not give you that but you have to be poor in Spirit and humble yourself. You don't have to be rich to be a Christian. You actually own nothing in this world. Whatever God has given to you He has entrusted to you to use for Him and it doesn't matter how much you have, you just make sure that it doesn't have you and that the Lord has you. This idolatry of riches is like that wind that blows and everything wilts with the oven blast of its emptiness, yet people will sell their soul for it.

The takeaway is Gospel wisdom freely given by God through believing prayer gives Gospel clarity for every trial of life by reminding me that Christ is all I need in life because Christ is my life. You're lowly because the world tells you that you're lowly and the world tells you that you're not worth anything, perhaps it's the color of your skin, how much money you have, or you don't have their degrees or this or that. The world looks at you from the outside and it makes the declaration that you are lowly. It mocks you and marginalizes you because you are lowly. Here is a trial of life. I am under adversity. I am in poverty. I don't have a resume with success records all around it. I'm working at my minimum wage. I am living where people say you are a nobody but I have come to Christ as my Lord and Savior yet the world has marginalized me.

So what do you do? Here is what I would encourage you to do. When the world marginalizes you as a follower of Christ in the midst of your adversity don't believe it. You are a child of the Living King. Tell the world you don't believe what they say. I am a trophy of God's grace. I may not be able to dress like you but the dress I have is the perfect righteousness of Christ. I may not be a part of your affluent family but Jesus is my Savior, God is my Father and I belong to the redeemed of the Lord. I have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. I am a joint heir with Jesus Christ. I am filled with the Spirit of God. I am His workmanship. I am His masterpiece. He writes the story of my life with an inkwell that has been filled with the blood of Jesus from the cross. You will not control my life by the lack of applause, by your mocking or your marginalization but the same Jesus that saved me can save you and He is my life. I am His and He is mine. I have been sought by Him. I have been saved by Him. I have been sealed by Him. I am a trophy of His sovereign grace and I will be kept by Him for His glory. I am a part of the apple of His eye and that's enough.

All of us know theologically that if I say 'Jesus is enough' or 'Jesus is all I need' we all nod our head but very seldom do we know that Jesus is all I need until Jesus is all I have. Most of us in this church are socially, economically positioned that we're insulated from that statement I just made and we have to see through it by the power of the Holy Spirit when any trial in life comes. Jesus is all I need but most often we don't know it until He is all I have.

What about our brother who is esteemed in the world, with riches, adulation and applause? When the world comes to the lowly person and says “You’re nothing” and the believer who is Christ in the midst of poverty with the world mocking them, they just say ‘sorry, I don’t believe that for Jesus is my life and He is enough.’ So what about if you’re successful, as many of you are in this church? What if you have resources, as many of you are in this church? Didn’t we just go through a great recession? Go look at the pictures from 1930 and look at the pictures from now. I’m not putting down where we have been through but it’s amazing how our metrics have even re-interpreted our recession.

What do I do when the world comes to me and says “Applause, adulation, I want to write a book on you or interview you,” what do you do? Say the same thing “Sorry I don’t believe that. You do not boast in what they boast in for you boast in your humiliation. I am what I am by the grace of God. I am only what I am because of the grace of God. All that I have I have received. You think that you have just given me applause and made me somebody. You didn’t make me somebody. He must increase and I must decrease. You need to know that without Him I can do nothing. I am nothing. Your applause is only a platform for me to tell you about Jesus. That’s all it is. I am grateful for it but I’m not going to get on that platform. I’m going to put Him on that platform, if I have athletic success or academic success or vocational success. He goes on the platform. Me? I’m nothing. He must increase and I must decrease.

I want to look at I Timothy 6 in closing. I Timothy 6:17-19 says [17] *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.* [18] *They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,* [19] *thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.* Don’t let the world’s metric system be your hope. It is like a breath of Sirocco wind. It brings the dust of death. Your greatest joy is when He is lifted up. When the world says to you that you don’t have enough gold and you’re not worth anything, don’t believe it. You have been purchased by the blood of Jesus. When the world says to you that you have a lot of gold and that you’re successful and you are somebody, don’t believe it. All that stuff just fades.

I like the way one guy said it. Gold? In heaven the streets are paved with gold, so why should I be defined with paving material. We just throw that stuff out and walk on it in heaven. You and I need to realize that the Lord is our life.

There is a whole class of people in our society called celebrity-ism. I’m not talking about the celebrities individually for that’s a different story. We have made a whole class of people that have money, power, prestige and applause and we say ‘they are somebody.’ Would you like to know who the biggest purchaser of counseling and therapy is? It is the celebrity class. If all that power, prestige and adulation made you somebody, then why would they need that? No, they need the Lord. You need the Lord. We need the Lord and we need to say ‘the Lord is my life no matter what station I find myself in and what the world is telling me’ so that you and I are there and so that the Lord is our life.

I believe the most lethal challenge of all is the fatal attraction to the applause of men and the wealth of this world. There is nothing more rare than to find a humble man or woman who is successful but there is nothing more glorious than to find someone

without the applause of men that points to Christ and those with the applause of the world that turns everybody to Christ and away from them. Why? It is because you have a Christ-centered, cross shaped mind.

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9). [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him (Philippians 2:5-9a). Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you (1 Peter 5:6), because He is your exaltation. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together. Thank You for the privilege to in Your Word. Would You speak to our hearts, God? I know in my mind and heart I sense that there must be people reading this because the world's offering of the idolatry of success and money they have already found empty like a breath of hot wind so Father today may they hear of Christ who became poor that they might become rich in what matters for eternity, a living, saving, vital, growing relationship with Christ whereby they might heroically stand fast for Christ in a broken world and gloriously grow in grace in the midst of it, all the while ceasing the platform of adversity or prosperity to say "Christ is enough for Christ is my life." God I pray that You would give us the mind of Christ that people might see the life of Christ in the trials of this life that we face, we don't flee, for our joy is in the Lord, I pray in Jesus Name, Amen.