

The Epistle of James

Lesson #3
October 3, 2021

James 1:9-16

- **Recap:**

- Last week we considered verses 2-8.
- The gist of it is this:
 - Trials are one of God's main instruments for growing us toward spiritual maturity. God uses trials to make us more complete. So when they come upon us, we should actually experience joy – even in the difficulty – seeing it as evidence that “God is at work within you, both to will and to do according to his good pleasure.”
 - When we do experience a trial, and we don't know what to do, we should ask God for wisdom, and have confidence that he will give us more than enough wisdom for the occasion.
 - As we move into the next verses, it is important to keep this context in mind. In fact, verses 2-18 all address the issue of how we should deal with trials and temptations.

9-11 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. 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.

- **State the apparent theme of this passage.**

- I'm not sure there is one! 😊
- This is one of those verses that would be easy to just read quickly, and then to move on to something clearer.
- But there really is a lot here, if we will just take a moment to unwrap it.

- **First thing is to make sure this opening phrase is clearly understood.**

- *Let's add a couple of words:*
 - *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich **[brother boast]** in his humiliation...*

- **Who are the “lowly”, and who are the “rich”? Is it only socio-economic?**

- Lowly and rich – From the way the words are used, they appear to be opposites.
- The apparent meaning is poor versus rich. But some other contrasts also work:
 - Social status or importance
 - Occupation – trash collector versus Wall Street lawyer
 - Physical attractiveness
 - Athletic ability – benchwarmer versus star quarterback
 - Artistic ability
 - Intelligence

- **What is the difference between “exaltation” and “humiliation”?**
 - Exaltation – the action of elevating someone in rank, power, or character; OR to elevate by praise or in estimation
 - I found one quote that might be helpful:

In his sovereign rule, God has seen fit to bless and to elevate those he has chosen. Abraham and Isaac enjoyed God's spiritual and material blessing (Gen 24:35 ; 26:13), and the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River served to "exalt" Joshua as a leader close to the stature of Moses (Joshua 3:7). Those who are righteous are lifted up and given honor (Psalm 75:10 ; 112:9); God takes special delight in raising up the poor and humble (1 Sam 2:7-8).

- Humiliation – to reduce someone to a lower position in one's own eyes or others' eyes; OR to make someone ashamed or embarrassed
 - We typically think of humiliation in completely derogatory terms.
- **What does it mean to “boast”?**
 - I think Jeremiah 9:23-24 can be helpful:

Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.

- Normally, we think of boasting as bragging; but it can also mean: exult, glory, rejoice, and especially to exult in what God has done.
- **Restate the first part of verse 9:**

Let the lowly brother (i.e. the one who is not the richest, or the smartest, or the most athletic, or the most talented) rejoice in the fact that God in his grace has spiritually elevated him above his circumstance and station; and let the brother who is rich in these various ways glory in the fact that God in his grace has opened his eyes to his need of forgiveness and salvation, has humbled him, and has called him to be his own.

12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

- **In a few words, state the apparent theme of this passage.**
 - Stand firm!
- **What does “blessed” mean?**
 - Blessed – sometimes substituted with “happy”. But it goes deeper than that.
 - Happy in the Lord; joy of the Lord
- **What does “the crown of life” refer to?**
 - “Crown of life” does not refer to some sort of reward or prize we receive with congratulations for having endured to the end. A better way of saying this is “the crown, which is life”.
- **How long does it take before you can say you have “stood the test”?**
 - Several times in the gospels, Jesus says that “the one who endures to the end will be saved.” Matthew 10:22; Mark 13:13; Matthew 24:13

- One of the proofs of genuine faith is that it endures, it perseveres. Those who don't endure to the end were never truly believers to begin with. This is what the apostle John has in mind in 1 John 2:19:

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

- **Can you think of a time when you were not experiencing some kind of trial?**
 - James' point is, do not expect to live a life free from trials. This is not the goal.
 - Since trials are a fact of life, we should embrace them, and let them do their work. Let them produce maturity in us; let them prove the genuineness of our faith – and all to the glory of God.

13-16 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one[with evil]. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers.

- **In a few words, state the apparent theme of this passage.**
 - Don't blame God when you sin. And please don't say as Flip Wilson used to say, "The devil made me do it!"
- **Words to define:**
 - Tempted – The words "trial" and "temptation" come from the same Greek word.
 - The distinction has to do with the source. Trials come from the outside, from circumstances; temptations originate in the heart.
 - Consider the chain of temptation: enticed by own desire; desire is conceived; birth to sin; sin "grows up" and results in death.
 - Lured – includes the idea of "bait". We use lures to catch fish.
 - Enticed – The word "entice" means to persuade with promises of something. It means to lure or tempt someone by promising them something they like.
- **How do we protect ourselves from temptations?**
 - How did Jesus do this in the wilderness? By quoting Scripture.
 - Psalm 119:9-11 says:

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word.

With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

- **Important closing point:**
 - God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one with evil. On the contrary, He provides the way out.
 - 1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.