

The Great Equalizer-the Gospel

James 1:9-11

Notes

The disciple is not to focus on his financial position, but on his position in Christ

INTRODUCTION

In 2015 I had to buy a new truck. The truck I had I bought brand new in 2006 and the old Silverado had over 250,000 miles on it and was using oil and had plenty of dents and other mechanical issues. And if I am being honest, I am pretty rough on vehicles. My dad and I are complete opposites when it come to our vehicles. He carries a bottle of cleaner with him and wheel shine everywhere he goes. I don't mind running a fresh washed truck through the mud if needed.

So, I went and bought a brand new 2015 Ford F150. It was the new body style Ford. It had the Sport package with the turbo boosters. Ooh wee it was fine. I was so happy to go and show my dad my new truck. It was clean, dent free, and had that nice smell. I intended to keep it that way.

Fast forward about two weeks after buying the truck. Me and two of my deacons were going to the Louisiana Evangelism Conference in Lafayette. We get to the church, and I begin backing up into the parking space. The truck had a backup camera which I was not used to using.

Just before I was about to stop, I felt a thump. What could it be? We got out and looked and it was a small sapling that was right on the curb. I hit the sampling just hard enough and this stupid aluminum bed of the new F-150 dented at the top.

I can't tell you the amount of anger that welled up in me at that moment. I swear if I would have had a match, I would have lit the whole truck on fire. And to make it worse, one of my deacons, Bro. Ed said, "Man Brad. That dent is in a bad place. I don't think you can get that out."

I spent the first several hours of that conference, with great singing and great preaching sitting in the chair being mad, not benefiting from any of it.

That stupid dent ruined my entire day and it made me not care about the truck at all anymore.

Why was my attitude like this? Was it because a dent was in my truck? I had never really cared about that stuff at all before.

Why did a little dent in a truck cause me so much sin in my heart?

Let me pull back the curtain a little. You see I had begun to get plugged into several things in the state; I was speaking more; I thought I might be becoming somebody and not just a poor boy from the sawmill.

**I tied all of my worth with others, with myself, and even with my dad into that dumb truck.
I misplaced my worth. My worth, for that season was in this thing, this possession and not
in my identity with Jesus.**

**I can't prove it, but I half think God caused that tree to grow in that spot as I was backing
up just to dent that truck.**

As we have started going through the book of James, he is writing to those believers who have been persecuted beyond belief. Many have lost houses, jobs, families, and have had to flee their homes and begin new lives.

Chapter One is all about enduring trials.

After giving general instruction on how to endure trials and their purposes, James now turns to give some more instruction on how to endure trials.

⁹ But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; ¹⁰ and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

James will focus a lot on money and those with money in this letter. And he does so not in a spiteful way, but with a pastoral heart because he knows the danger money can be to the frail human heart.

Maybe you are here this morning, and you find yourself during this season of life focusing more on money or even the things of this world in general more so than Christ and your identity in him.

I have learned personally, and walked with others who have made that mistake.

As we walk through our text this morning, I want you to ask yourself: God, am I placing money, possessions, or status above my identity with you?

God, am I gaining more value from my identity as a person of means than as a child of God?

God, am I focusing more on getting out of poverty than I am focusing on getting out of sin?

When we focus on our financial position, we will strive to increase our wealth, and we will lose our focus on Christ.

THE DECLARATION OF THE LOWLY

⁹ But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;

Your worth is not measured by the size of your bank account or the influence it affords you.

As James was talking to these individuals of humble circumstances, he tells them something strange.

James tells them to glory, to rejoice, to lift up their high position.

These Jewish Christians were poor because of their faith. Their faith in Jesus caused them to take stands that put them in direct opposition of the culture around them.

The culture around them turned on them and persecuted them to the point of losing houses and jobs.

Now because they were economically poor, they were low in the eyes of the world and no doubt, probably low in their own eyes.

So why does James instruct the poor man to rejoice or to glory in this position?

It is not simply because the person is poor, but this low economic position has produced in him a lowliness of spirit that keeps him open to and close to God.

Jesus tells us in **Mt. 5:3**, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

The believer of little means has a greater ability to see his or her need and thus draw closer to Jesus.

The believers' economic poverty caused them spiritual poverty and this spiritual poverty caused them to depend on Jesus even more.

James is not showing pity to them because of their situation, instead he is viewing them as spiritually advantaged.

They may have not had anything to physically boast about in this world, but their boast was greater than those who could boast in themselves.

Their poverty turned into a double benefit, for it encouraged humility and faith, both of which God requires and blesses.

There are many of us in this room who have experienced times of poverty and times of want, some of us may be experiencing those times right now.

Don't focus on what you do not have on this temporary earth, but on what you do have in the eternal heaven.

I can vividly remember being a sophomore who had just moved to New Orleans to go to school. I was in school, couldn't find a job and got called to the business office and had to speak to the Vice President, Mr. Clay. He told me that he was glad that God had called me and brought me to the school, but that they needed tuition payment. Can I confess something to you? I told Mr. Clay a bald face lie. With all the confidence of a used car salesman I told Mr. Clay not to worry, that he would have money from me next week.

Now, I had no idea where this money would come from, but I believed God would provide.

I remember going back to my dorm room, laying prostrate on the floor, and just crying my eyes out to the Lord. I began singing and praising God for all his goodness. I told him I trusted him even though I had no idea how I would make it.

To this day, those few hours on that floor are some of the sweetest, most intimate times I've ever spent with Jesus, and I was flat broke.

When you don't have much, it is easy to complain about what you don't have and not see how much you do have in Christ.

Beloved, you have Christ! You may not have any hope of today, but bless God, in Jesus, you have the hope of an eternal tomorrow in glory!

The natural trope for us to say is that those who are wealthy are the guiltiest of making money an idol, but I have known many people of lowly means who have made the accumulation of money, the getting out of poverty, an idol - more so than some of the wealthy I have known.

If you are struggling financially right now, I know how scary that feels. I know what it is like to live paycheck to paycheck. I know what it's like to not have a savings account. I know what it is like to pray the car tires last another three months.

You may be hungry, but you have the bread of life. You may be low in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of God you are exalted. You may be thirsty, but you have the water of life. You may be poor, but you have eternal riches. You may be cast aside by men, but you have been eternally received by God. (John MacArthur, *James*, 39).

Beloved, don't allow that fear to turn into sin and rob you of the hope of your eternal joy.

Instead, allow your lowliness of means to cause you to be low of spirit.

Are you allowing what you don't have to draw you to Jesus or pull you from Jesus?

And as you go to Jesus to be filled, he promises to fill you with his righteousness and holiness so that you may demonstrate to the world, that even in your poverty, you will live faithfully for Jesus and display his faithfulness to you.

THE DANGERS OF THE WEALTHY

Next, Jesus turns his attention to the wealthy believers.

¹⁰ and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

If the instruction of the poor to glory in his exaltation seemed strange, the instruction for the wealthy to glory in his humiliation seems really crazy.

You see, God's view of the things is often the opposite view of the world.

James is not mad at the believer who has money, he is reminding the wealthy believer two things:

His money is only temporary as is his life

His money will be a temptation to him to trust in himself and not God

The believer who is materially well-off, healthy, and blessed should rejoice when trials come. When trials come, they teach the wealthy believer the temporary nature of those material things and their inability to give inner peace and joy.

The danger for the wealthy is that they begin to trust in their wealth more than Christ; they begin to trust in their skill of acquisition more than Christ's ability to provide; they begin to trust in the security of their future more than Christ's eternal security.

Jesus tells us in Mark 10, 24-25 that it is impossible for anyone who trusts in riches to get into heaven.

You see, material wealth lures us to focus on "things" instead of Jesus.

The greater one's possessions the greater the likelihood of self-delusion.

As Jesus was speaking to the church of Laodicea in **Rev. 3:17** he says,

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked.”

The whole church in Laodicea thought they were blessed and ok with Jesus because of their material possession, but their abundance of material possession caused them to be spiritually bankrupt.

The more dependent we grow on the size of our bank account, the less dependent we become on Christ.

Before we begin to throw stones at who we perceive to be wealthy, let us realize a few facts about living in the United States.

The average net worth of Americans is 30% of the global net worth.

If you make \$250,000 or more, you are considered in the top 5% in America.

The median household in the US is \$63,000 and this places you in the top .17% of the richest in the world as the median worldwide income is just \$2,000 a year.

More than half of all US households make 30 times more than the worldwide income.

Why am I sharing this with you? Because I don't want us to take our situation for granted. You may not be wealthy in your own eyes, but in the eyes of another, you may live like a king.

Those who are blessed financially must strive to drive themselves to Christ even more so than others because the danger of the love of money pulls so fiercely.

If you are wealthy that is not a sin, it's not a bad thing. Make all the money you can and use it for the glory of God. Build churches, build hospitals, build orphanages; send missionaries around the world, provide for those who don't have.

Allow the skills and talents God has given you to acquire wealth to bless others because James reminds us that wealth, just as our lives, are fleeting and temporary like a flower which passes away.

So, use what God has blessed you with to bless others.

But also, be very cognoscente of the dangers of wealth.

Set up guardrails to protect your heart and mind of the love of money and its attraction. Give someone in your life besides your spouse freedom to speak into your life to hold you accountable for your heart.

You will have to strive all the more to intimacy with Christ because of the allure of the security of money.

Ask yourself, am I trusting more in my ability to make money than I am in Christ's provision?

Has my time with Jesus slipped away because I'm devoting more time to my business interests?

Be sure to draw near to Christ more than you draw near to money.

THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL

What James does here is show us the truth of the gospel.

For the person who is in poverty or of low economic means they are to focus on Christ and rejoice in the fact that heaven is their eternal home instead of focusing on what they do not have now.

For the person who is wealthy they are to focus on Jesus so they may take upon his humility and realize the fleeting nature of everything instead of focusing their abundance of money and possessions.

What is James telling us? James is telling us the same thing that Paul tells us in Galatians 3:28, that there,

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal. 3:28)

That every single person has the exact same worth and value and is worthy of dignity and honor because,

“God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Gen. 1:27).

And in that image, every one of us, from the person who has a negative balance in their bank account to the person who has so much money he needs two bank accounts,

“all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

And in our sin,

“God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes on him would not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16).

You see beloved, the gospel is the greater equalizer for all people.

Whether you have a little or a lot, your goal, as a disciple is one thing-Jesus.

If you don't have much money, don't make the focus of your life acquiring more money.

If you have money and wealth, don't make the focus of your life acquiring more money.

Don't concern yourself with what you have or don't have; don't stress over what someone else has that you don't.

Don't focus on all that you have.

Focus on Jesus.

It is the gospel of Jesus that says we are all equal in God's eyes. It is the gospel of Jesus that allows sinners like us to come together in a place like this and together we lift up our voices and our hands and we thank God for the shower of blessings he has given us in Jesus.

As a disciple, the majority of our attention and energy is to be focused on the one who has saved us and that one is Jesus.

What has your focus been on lately? If you had to make a list what would make your top three? What has your attention, your energy, your effort right now in this season?

Is it Jesus? If not, why?

Everything else in your life will fade away, but nothing you do for Christ will fade.

CONCLUSION

Don't allow money or anything of this world to dictate your life. Draw your worth and direction from Jesus.

Have you allowed the things of this world to give you worth and direction?

You may have been trying to feel worth from the things of this world and you wonder why it doesn't seem to be working.

The reason is there is nothing in this world that can fix the problem in your heart and that is sin.

Sin is the problem of every one of our hearts and this sin causes a great chasm between us and God.

I want to encourage you to turn from the things of this world and turn to Jesus this morning.

Maybe you realize you have been placing more emphasis on your financial or physical position in life than on your walk with Jesus and God is reminding you today that is not what you need to be doing.

I want to encourage you today to repent and commit to the Lord to walk closely with him and trust in him instead of this world.