

The Right Perspective on Trials: God's Perspective on Wealth

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[0 : 00] Amen. We started last week under this heading, The Right Perspective.

Now, of course, the larger heading is trials, bumps in the road that we experience, points of suffering, difficulty, trouble, whatever word we want to use to describe it.

Persecution will be a part of that. And so, you know, the larger theme is this. And having then the right perspective on trials and things associated with trials, how we're to respond to them and so forth.

And specifically in our study at the moment is what God has provided for us or what we need in order to, when we face our trials.

So a little bit of a review. Remember chapter 1, verses 5 through 18. This is the text that we're looking at right now.

[1 : 29] Now, we've already been through the first few verses, verse 5 through 8, and we're going to continue tonight. But these verses continue a kind of an argument that James is making in regard to persecution.

An argument, a case he's making for not just persecution, but really an argument he's making about faith itself.

And so he's arguing at this point why the believer should, quote, count it all joy when the believer falls into various trials.

Not if, but when. Because we will all experience these things. And that comes, of course, from verse 2. So he's arguing what he's already stated and said will be a reality.

Now, in these verses 5 through 18, this is a continuation of that subject and the case that he's building here. Principles that he's teaching us here.

[2 : 32] Trials then, according to James, and this is the large picture, this is the large theme. I think the running theme throughout the book of James. Trials then reveal something that's very important.

And that is the genuineness of our faith. And these trials work to bring it to full maturity. Now, that, I think, is pretty, in one sentence, and that's amazing, that we could sum up the objective, the intent of James in really the entire book.

Now, there are other lessons that are taught that are woven throughout the letter. But all of them fit under this desire of James that it would reveal to us what is true.

Now, if it's not true, it will reveal that too. I mean, if you do not have true faith, biblical faith, saving faith, then it will reveal that as well.

But this is his intent. He's not writing to lost people and giving them, you know, what they must do to have this faith. He's writing to believers who presumably have faith, a genuine faith.

[3 : 49] And so he's writing to, of all things, to encourage them about it, to prove to them that they have genuine faith, and, you know, to work to bring them to full maturity.

These verses here, I can't kind of say it all. Knowing that the testing or proving of your faith produces patience. Now, that's the word in the New King James, and I think also in the New King James.

Endurance is the idea. These, you know, to prove your faith proves or produces endurance. But let this endurance have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

So you see those two things are in there. The genuineness of your faith, proving of it, and the working to perfect it, to bring it to maturity. So then, again, this is all review.

The words, lacking nothing, that's in that verse right at the end of verse 4. Those words point us to three resources we need for the trials that will surely come in our lives.

[5 : 06] And so that brings us up to speed. That's where we were last week. And the first of these three, again, we looked at this last week. See, God's provision of wisdom.

All right, that was last week. By the way, you can fill in some of these blanks, and we'll make a little bit of a review here, Paul. See, there's always grace. With the Lord, always.

All right. Verse 5. If any of you lacks wisdom. All right, so there's the first thing. God's provision of wisdom. If any of you lacks wisdom, the implication is you do lack it, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally, without reproach, and it will be given to him.

And then we looked at three things. The sense of it. This is all review, so don't look at me. Like, well, I already know this. Some of you might not have been here.

The sense of it. That is, in what sense is he talking about wisdom? Well, it is the ability. This wisdom is the ability to discern the true cause of the trial.

[6 : 17] See, the wisdom we need, though we need wisdom for a number of things, but the wisdom that we're talking about here is the wisdom that we need in relation to the trial that we're facing, so that this wisdom gives us the ability to discern the true cause of the trial, the suffering or the problem, whatever we're facing, also God's purpose and goal in the trial, and how to correctly respond to the trial, both actively and passively.

We talked about all that last week. So there's the sense of it. And the source of it, this wisdom, that is, the source of it is what? Or who? God.

God is the source of true wisdom. Well, any wisdom. Well, all true wisdom, whether it's connected to the trials that we're facing, the wisdom we need for that, or any wisdom that we need.

God is the source of it. Because this wisdom is not something you can go learn. Not something you study to find. You don't have to go to school. You can't go to school to learn this. This is something that God gives you.

And He gives it to you when you ask for it. But He gives it to you unconditionally, liberally, graciously, and absolutely. And we looked at all of that last week.

[7 : 32] The securing of it, finally, verse 6, but let Him ask in faith with no doubting. And then, of course, we looked at the illustration He gives about that, like the shifting waves of the sea.

The wind blows it this way and that way. And we can't be like that, doubting or double-minded. So the securing of it, of this wisdom we need for this time of trial we're going through, we get it from God, and we lay hold of it through faith.

We have to ask in faith, not doubting. Alright, so that's all reviewed. Now we're ready to go to the second thing. God's perspective on wealth. Now, you know, when you start looking at these verses, like verse 9, let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation.

The subject here is poverty versus rich wealth. And, you know, our first thought perhaps is, well, what does that have to do with trials and persecution?

I think we could probably mentally make some very quick connections. But the subject is still the same. What do we need when we face a trial? Well, we need God's wisdom, but we also need God's perspective.

[8 : 55] God's perspective on wealth, on material things, on the things of this world. We need His perspective on those things, because almost always these things are associated with the trials we're facing in one way or another.

Alright, so then, verses 9 and 10 say, let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation. Verse 10 says, but the rich in his humiliation. Well, what does all that mean? Well, it's giving us a perspective, the right perspective, about the things of this world.

Verse 8, as a matter of fact, and this we looked at last week, it's kind of the ending remark in what James is teaching us in verse 8.

He says, he, the, and he's talking about the doubter, verse 6, the doubter is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. The double-minded man.

Now, when it's talking about that, double-mindedness is a reference to, it's a sign of worldliness in the believer. So when I talk about wealth and God's perspective, I'm not just talking about cash in the bank.

[10 : 10] I'm talking about everything that we would connect to prosperity. Earthly, worldly, prosperity, whether it's, you know, food in the pantry, money in the bank, cars in the, in the garage,

if you park yours in the garage, a lot of people don't.

They can't, because they've got too much wealth in the garage. You know, can't get, but whatever it may be, a house, material things, it can even be intangible things, like positions of influence, power, respect even can be a part of that, earthly respect, worldly respect, so forth.

So we're talking about, when I talk about wealth, I'm not just talking about money. And so, double-mindedness is a reference to worldliness.

And when a person, and of course he's talking about believers here, not, not unbelievers, an unbeliever can't be double-minded in this sense, because the unbeliever doesn't know God, doesn't have any care for the kingdom of God.

The double-minded person, on the other hand, is trying to live in two worlds at the same time. So we're talking about a believer who is still, you know, kind of has one foot on the altar, and one foot in the world, you know.

[11:37] And so, trying to live both those worlds at the same time, desiring the goals of this world, goals, the things that this world loves, and wants, and strives for, so trying to, kind of desiring those things, at the same time, desiring the goals of the kingdom of God.

Trying to do those things at the same time, and by the way, it's impossible. Jesus said so. Jesus said, double-mindedness will never work. You cannot serve God and mammon.

What's mammon? Wealth. Wealth. Now, you can put money in there if you want, but it's not just, you know, currency, in that sense.

It's material prosperity, material wealth. And Jesus said, you can't serve God, or the kingdom of God, and serve the goals of the world, which are wealth, tangible, material.

Can't do that at the same time. They can't go together. And so, we have a struggle. So, James is saying then, if you are double-minded, you will struggle when the trials of life come.

[12:54] That's why it's so important that not only do we get God's wisdom when to face trials and, you know, whatever the trial is, not only do we need His wisdom, but we also need His perspective.

Perspective because almost always the struggles we have in the midst of trials are attached, connected in some way to our connection with the world. and the loss of things that we hold dear, or even the bringing out of our grasp those things that we have desired.

And those are all involved in this. And so, Jesus said, if you're double-minded, you're going to always struggle with the trials of life. So, that's why we need God's perspective on worldly things. there will be no peace in your heart if you're double-minded because this peace comes from having God's perspective on those things that pertain to our world.

Your world. I'm not talking about the world in general. I mean your world. Your kind of sphere in which you live. Where you live. The things you live for.

[14:12] The influences in your world. And so, peace comes from having God's perspective on those things pertaining to your world. Whether it's family, work, whatever it is.

And so, you can't be double-minded. So, we need the right perspective. You understand what I'm saying? This is so crucial. I don't think we really think of these things.

And that's why God has been so gracious through the Holy Spirit to inspire James to write these things down. we don't necessarily even associate or even think about these particular issues when we're going through a trial.

You know, God, I need wisdom so I know what's causing this and how to respond to it and wisdom on what you are wanting to accomplish through it. Or, God, help me right now to have the right perspective on my material possessions and ambitions and such.

you know, we don't always associate, in fact, I think rarely associate these things with how we're to respond and make it through the trials of life.

[15:22] So we need a new perspective and it's not just a new one, it's God's perspective. Alright, so James then is talking about the trials of poverty and wealth.

And I put a little question there, which one would you volunteer for? Trial of wealth or a trial of poverty? Which one would you rather, you volunteer for, God, give me the trial of poverty.

Alright, do you want that one? But actually, God, both these things occur. The trial of poverty, the trial of wealth.

And so this forms his discussion. And so you have the lowly brother, brother, the lowly brother, or I like the new American standard, brother of humble circumstances.

I think that's good. It's more than, you know, in this case not really a literal translation even though the NASB is, you know, notorious for being so literal that the translation is kind of hard to read. [16:26] But this time it's more interpretive. But this is a good interpretation. Brother of humble circumstances. I mean, it's just one word in the Greek text and that's kind of giving you the full meaning of it.

So what are we talking about? We're talking about poverty. Talking about not just, you know, poverty in the sense that you don't have any money, but maybe even your circumstances of life are very humble.

Maybe, you know, your job is not one of those jobs that, you know, that everybody's just beaten down the door to have. And, you know, that kind of thing.

Whatever, you can just fill in the blank. We're talking about the lowly brother. The lowly brother, according to James, experiences the trial of need, whatever that need may be.

Need, and I would even add to that maybe even desires, because, you know, sometimes it's a little difficult for us to distinguish between what we need and what we want.

[17:30] sometimes what we want is what we need. Not every time is that the case, but sometimes it's the case. All right, so we're talking about the lowly brother.

Now he has two options, or two things can happen. Will this lowly brother, the brother of humble circumstances, or sister, by the way, will he fixate on his lowly means?

I mean, that's just his whole focus, the lowly means, his poverty, his struggles, thinking that his life would only be good if he could have what he does not have.

Do people respond that way, to trials of need, that somehow the answer here is for me to get what I need? Isn't that very natural to think in that way, and think that the only solution here, the only good one, the only one acceptable to me is that God would be merciful and give me what I need.

But what if he doesn't? And again, you know, there's that fine line between need and want, you know, things you desire. I mean, do you ever occur to you?

[18:48] I mean, there's people who are in need, humble circumstances, there are people who are wealthy, but the spectrum is between those two.

I mean, you know, the guy who has a pair of tennis shoes, and that's all he has to get around with, can really want a bicycle, you know, so that he can get around a little bit better, so he has a need in his life, and I guess the guy with a bicycle could look at the fellas out there, you know, on their motorcycles, and say, you know, it would be a lot better, God, if I could have a motorcycle, you know, or a guy on the motorcycle, and that's all he has, he looks at those guys driving, those people driving down the highway in their brand new cars, and he said, you know, it would be better if I could have a car, and, you know, I guess you could go from there, you know, it would be wonderful, I could have a, you know, a Rolls Royce with a chauffeur, you know, you could be driving around a Cadillac, and say, you know, my poor, humble circumstances, I mean, I deserve to have somebody to drive me around, you know, I've been talking about, you know, it's kind of, kind of, there's all kinds of strata, huh?

Then you'll need that pair of shoes. Yeah, and maybe somebody's barefooted, and said, God, if I could just have, you know, I would be much happier, and the solution to my struggles, this trial I'm going through, is that you would provide a pair of shoes, but what if he doesn't?

Now, these are just kind of scenarios, but it's the principle that we need to learn here. Regardless of the circumstance that we would maybe define, and maybe rightfully define, as humble means, or humble circumstances, we should never, James is saying, the right response is not to fixate on the lowly means, or the need that you have, you know, and only thinking that the only solution here is that God, give me what I do not have.

You understand? As opposed to glory, will he glory in his situation, whatever the situation is, because he or she realizes that though he is poor by the world's standard, whatever that standard is at the time, by the way, that's ever changing, isn't it?

[21:17] the standard or the definition of poverty, not only is ever changing in our culture, but if you take a cross-section of the world, and you see that poverty means something different everywhere you go, but the point is, will he glory in his situation, whatever it is, because he realizes that though he's poor by the world's standard, he is rich in Jesus Christ, exalted in Christ, and that's the meaning by the way of the idea behind his exaltation, so let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, the idea is not that he would glory in God finally lifting him up and giving him what he needs, he's talking about his greater riches in Christ, now is it okay then for our church to purchase a bunch of

reading glasses for people in Ukraine who do not have any way to really read?

Of course it is, that's not what we're talking about here, we're talking about how the individual believer responds to the trial he or she is having, whether it is a physical need, or some need in the family, or some relational need, or whatever it is, we want something else and think we need something else and maybe we do need those things, and maybe God will give them to us, but from our position God is saying what you need to be concerned about is glorying in your situation because you realize that actually this is all really at the end of the day or the end of life is meaningless anyway.

it's my relationship with Christ that means everything. Now, let me ask you something, even though it's still hard for us to make that connection because there's so many other kind of if, ands, and circumstantial things, but if we could really buy that, buy into that, and we should, it's God's word, then would that provide something we need when we face a trial, provide the very thing we need? Not only wisdom, verses 5 through 8, but also perspective on the things of this world. Alright, so that's the lowly brother, how about the other side?

This is the side that you voted for, you know, I'll take this trial. Well, the rich brother, and I put brother there, it's implied, but we're talking about God's people, male and female here, the rich experience the trial of pride and self-sufficiency.

[24 : 16] It's kind of on the other end of it, though really you can make the case that no matter how rich a person becomes, that rich person always wants more and thinks he needs more, thinks he's in need, but the rich experience, they don't experience the trial of need per se, but the trial of pride and self-sufficiency.

all right, so again, two ways you might go if you're one of the rich brothers, and if you are, you know, we've got some things we need to get done around here if you'd like to donate some of that wealth. I'm just kidding. Our two things, will he fixate, here's a different fixation, fixate on his wealth to the point of forgetting God, and forgetting his greater riches in Christ.

Kind of forgetting, really, that those things the rich person enjoys all came from God. God allowed the rich person to have those things.

He then is the source. And so, the fixation can be, if we fixate on the wealth and the material and those things, whether it's notoriety, honor of some kind in your sphere of life, or whether it's tangible things, the rich man can forget where those things actually came from.

[26 : 02] But more than that, and more egregious, is that the rich person would forego the greater riches of Christ that God has for him, that are spiritual, that are eternal.

Adrian Rogers said our prosperity has become our curse. I heard him say that so many times, many times, in reference to America.

And I think you can make a pretty good case that a big part of our problem and the spiritual condition of our nation is because we're prosperous. and maybe it would be good for our nation to have a good dose of poverty.

I'm not praying for that. God might do that, and he wouldn't, he'd be gracious to, because our prosperity has become our curse. How so?

Well, why would anybody need God? If they have everything, have everything. You know, they could have a need, a want, and even beyond that. And some of you have been to other countries, some right here have been to Ukraine, some of you have been to Mexico, maybe some of you have been to other places in the world, no doubt.

[27 : 19] And though there are some affluent, obviously affluent countries and places in the world, but most places are not, and all you have to do is to go to a, quote, third world country, go to places where people live in poverty, and you realize that you know, we are extremely prosperous.

We don't always think we are, but even most of the poor among us are infinitely more wealthy and better off than a lot of people in this world.

So it's kind of a relative thing. prosperity, whatever level it is in your thinking, can become a curse because we fixate on those things and forget God, that he's the source of everything, and that we kind of tend to then avoid or forego the greater riches of Christ.

I put in a quote here, Spurgeon, there is no trial like prosperity. So I guess if you chose, you know, I want the trial of prosperity, then according to Spurgeon, I think he's probably right, it's probably the worst trial you could ever have in relation to your fellowship with God and the things that he wants you to have and how he wants you to live.

Or will he glory that his true riches are in Christ, just like the poor man. So it's the same, the response is always the same. We don't glory in what we don't have or rather we don't moan and groan and let our lives be destroyed because we don't have anything, nor do we, you know, glory, self-glory in the things we do have, we glory in that our true riches are in Christ.

[29 : 27] His earthly riches are as a flower of the field that will pass away. Let me put the entire passage in there, verses 10 and 11.

If you have a Bible open, you can look at it, but let me read it. And don't need to spend a lot of time on it because it's really very self-explanatory. Verse 10 says, of course, verse 9, he's talking about the lowly brother, and then verse 10, but the rich in his humiliation, and what is this humiliation? it actually is not that he would be stripped of everything he has, you know, that he should glory in that. Now, that would be one interpretation, but really the meaning is that one day all those things will be gone, and they won't matter.

He should glory that those things are so insignificant that one day when I lose them all, it won't matter. So, what if you had that perspective on the things you have right now?

The perspective that one of these days, that's all going to be gone in, I can't take it with me, so they really don't matter, they're not really important in light of eternity, you know, and so in that regard, the rich man and the poor man are the same.

[30 : 50] One day we'll be the same. we'll both be equally glorying in the greater riches of Christ, in the eternal riches, the treasures of heaven.

And so that's the idea here, you should glory that these things don't matter that one day they're all going to be gone anyway, and then he gives that illustration just as, because as a flower of the field, he will pass away, that is, he in the sense of his position as a rich person, that's going to pass away one day.

For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass, its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes, so the rich man also will fade away in his pursuit.

So it's kind of a dual meaning here. Certainly if the rich person is going with the first option, fixating on his wealth and notoriety, and praise of man, then one day that's all going to be gone.

It's going to fade away, be nothing. So you shouldn't fixate on those things. But the rich man who has the right perspective is the one who doesn't fixate on his possessions and so forth.

[32 : 15] he keeps his focus, his fixation on Christ and the greater riches of Christ. And so that's the idea there.

I guess I'm really going to have to stop. I'm already past time. I wasn't going to be able to finish everything anyway, so the next one, the third, is God's promise at work and we'll get to that later. That's something that we need. We need, not so much need to have it because we have it. We have God's promise. If you're a born again believer, then you have God's promise that the trial is God's work and it's a work that's going to accomplish a wondrous thing.

And so in this sense, it's not something we need that we don't have, it's something we need to acknowledge and fully embrace this wonderful blessing and reality that God promises are at work in the trial.

So we'll get to that the next time.