

Jas04 – A Paradox of Perspective James 1:9-11

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message, “A Paradox of Perspective.” How many of you just thought of Dr. Seuss? I do, every time I say paradox I see two obviously LSD created animals in a Dr. Seuss book – a pair of “dox.” That’s not the “dox” we’re talking about. We’re going to James and looking at James 1 verses 9-11. Today we have “A Paradox of Perspective.” And we need to know what a paradox is. So from Webster’s dictionary:

Webster’s: PARADOX

A statement that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.

How many of you know the Christian life is full of paradoxes. For instance, when I am weak, then I am strong. Or the slave is free. Or the cursed are blessed. Or death is life. The Christian life is a paradox; it’s an upside down understanding. So today we have a paradox of perspective. Let’s look at it in three different Bible versions.

James 1:9–10 (ESV)

*9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,
10 and the rich (boast) in his humiliation . . .*

James 1:9–10 (NIV)

*9 Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.
10 But the rich should take pride in their humiliation . . .*

James 1:9–10 (AMP)

*9 Let the brother in humble circumstances glory in his elevation,
10 And the rich person ought to glory in being humbled . . .*

These verses are “a Paradox of Perspective.” Down is up and up is down. A perspective that seems contradictory – opposed to common sense – yet the Bible says it is the correct perspective. If you are not living in a paradox world then you are probably living in the world. If you’re not living in the paradox of Jesus Christ and his life, then you are probably living in the flesh. Because everything about Jesus Christ is a paradox, it seems to contradict the world. It seems to contradict our flesh and yet it’s true. . And we need to pray today that we will apply these verses to correct our own perspective.

Let’s pray. *Lord Jesus please, reveal your paradox to us, Lord. What seems down in the world is up to you, Lord. What seems up in the world is down to you Lord. What seems like failure to the world is success, and success to you is so often failure to the world.*

Lord, we don't understand. WE don't have the ability Lord. Your ways are higher than our ways; your thoughts are higher than ours. It has to be divinely revealed to us, Lord. We can only grasp this spiritual truth if you reveal it to us. And so we ask and we say we are open to it. We say; come Lord Jesus, reveal your divine truths to us. Reveal to us your paradoxical view of our lives and this world. Our minds are open to it; we pray you would transform us with it today, in Jesus' name, amen.

James is full of teaching by paradox and upside down illustrations. In fact, James convinces us that our life in Jesus Christ is an upside down life! What the world calls down is actually the way up and what the world calls up, is so often actually the way down. What seems like a failure to us is often success to God. What seems like success to us is often failure to God. Being “low” can actually be “a very high position” yet “being at the top” can actually be a very low position. What we’re looking at this message is how James wants to use this “paradox” to give us the correct perspective on our current circumstances. He is continuing to show us how to have joy in trials, which is a paradox itself. Consider James 1:2 where James says to count it joy, consider it, and make a deliberate decision to embrace joy in the midst of your trials. That’s a paradox, and that’s the teaching he is continuing.

Most scholars agree that James is still on that same topic, that these verses are a continuation of the theme we’ve been addressing since James 1:2 and we really need to see that teaching continuing here.

First, James said deliberately choose joy in your trials because of the eternal good God can bring through them. Next, James said, but you must get God’s wisdom in order to handle your trial correctly and you’ve got to be single-minded in your faith as you do. Then, what we see this message, James says you must have the correct perspective in your circumstances and that correct perspective is an upside down perspective. Perspective is everything. How you see what’s in front of you impacts, drives, what you see and what you do.

One more time, here’s what we’re learning from James.

#1) Make a deliberate choice for joy in our trials. (Verse 2)

#2) Get God’s wisdom (in true faith) for our trials. (Verse 5)

#3) Have the correct perspective in all circumstances. (Verse 9)

And James is not finished yet. We have two more “life-changing truths” coming on this same subject.

And so, in this message, James brings us “The Paradox of Perspective” and he starts with the poor, the lowly and the humbled.

James 1:9 (ESV)

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,

In the NLT - James 1:9 (NLT)

9 Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them.

The poor, the lowly, those in humbled circumstances; they have something to boast about. They have something to glory in. They have something to take pride in. And when we are made low in our circumstances we must boast in, glory in, and take pride in how God has honored and exalted us. We must rest in, find peace in who we are in Christ, how much God is for us, and how close Christ is to us. When we are the lowest, in the deepest, darkest valley if we will reach out to Christ we will meet him in a way we cannot meet him in any other place. It’s great to go on the mountaintop and experience the glory of God, but when you meet him in the depth of the valley he changes who you are because of his presence in you. This isn’t easy. It is contrary to our nature. In fact it takes the supernatural power of God, in the person of the Holy Spirit to say, God you are so good, you’re carrying me. I feel your hand upon me. You’ve done so much for me, Lord, my eternity is so secure. The paradox perspective is, the lower we find ourselves, the easier it is to boast about (glory in) these truths.

If you are a child of God today and you are in poor and low circumstances, you have an incredible opportunity to set your perspective of things of eternally higher value. *You can choose a perspective that far outweighs your circumstances* (and that brings eternal rewards.) And James is not talking about just having a positive mental attitude. James is talking about grasping eternal truth over temporal truth. He’s talking about seeing the unseen, having an unstoppable confidence in God’s promises. That’s how Hebrew 11:1 defines faith. That’s the faith we talked about last message. That’s the faith that will change your perspective... and that faith is designed for your low condition.

Now, although the words “low” and “humble” are accurate words (verse 9) in the context James is contrasting the financially poor with the financially rich, which is good, because what is true for us today was just as true for Christians in that day. *Our financial condition so often determines our perspective on our life*, including with God. And James is shouting at us today that absolutely should not be the case. Whether poor or rich, whether low or high, our financial condition should never determine our perspective on our life (especially our life with God.) This is the same worldly, flesh-driven perspective

that draws people into the prosperity Gospel and entices pastors to lie to their congregations, implying God wants to be their ATM machine and the “fixer of all their problems.”

The problem is that is a worldly, fleshly perspective infiltrating a Christian’s mind. That is not a Godly perspective. That is not an eternal perspective. That is not the Bible’s perspective. That is the world’s perspective and it is a perspective we must crucify so that we can be transformed by correct perspective (paradox perspective.)

So what is the correct perspective for the poor and lowly? Verse 9 says it well.

James 1:9 (NLT)

9 Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them.

When we find ourselves in poor, low and in difficult circumstances we have the opportunity to grasp eternal truths while we are letting go of worthless lies. In Matthew 5:3 Jesus says:

Matthew 5:3 (ESV)

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Why is it a blessing to be poor in Spirit? Because there we’re in a place where we recognize our true need for God, the kingdom of heaven becomes ours. So often our poor and low circumstances are exactly what drive us to receive all that God has for us. And so in our low state, we must boast (glory in) all God has done for us, and doing so will change our perspective... if... if... if we will do our part. If we set our minds on eternal things we will develop God’s eternal perspective.

Colossians 3:1–4 (NLT)

***1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven* (perspective) . . .**

***2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth* (perspective).**

***3 For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God* (perspective).**

4 And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

The perspective of setting your mind on things above and not on things on earth come easily to those in poor (low) circumstances. Colossians 3:4 says:

Colossians 3:4

“when Christ is revealed - you will share in all his glory”

And Romans 8:17 says

“if we are children of God - we are Fellow HEIRS with Christ”

We will share in all the glory of Christ and we are fellow heirs with Christ (sharing his inheritance)

1Peter 2:9 says - ***You are God’s own possession***

Rom 8:35 - ***NOTHING can separate you from the LOVE of Christ***

1Peter Ch 1 - ***We’ve been born again to a Living Hope - we have an inheritance KEPT in heaven for us -& we are being KEPT by God’s Power while we’re here***

Promise after promise after promise from God each one that we can rejoice in and boast in and glory in. And the time to do it is when we are at our lowest, our poorest.

The great missionary, Hudson Taylor, possibly without equal (as a missionary) except for the Apostle Paul once wrote to his wife during an especially difficult trial. “We have 25 cents and ALL the promises of God.” That is a paradox of perspective! And that perspective will change your life right in the midst of your most trying and difficult trial.

There are so many resources on the promises of God, and if this is “speaking to you” you must get some. Max Lucado’s book on God’s promises has 300 separate promises covering over 90 separate topics. Charles Spurgeon’s Book of Promises has 365 promises, one for each day of the year. I tried to find a list of promises in the Bible, but it’s too complicated. Most people agree, though, there are over 3,000 promises. Do those 3,000 promises matter to you? Do they matter enough to change your perspective?

They will change your perspective *if* you will dedicate yourself to being immersed in them.

Romans 12:2 (ESV)

2 Do not be conformed to [the thinking of] this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind . . .

This is so critical, but all I can do in this message is challenge you to set yourself to “absorbing” – to “being immersed” in the promises of God – until your perspective is changed. And we have the tools for you to do that: Daily disc journals, scripture by topic lists, the Fundamentals Series, discipleship groups and resources we can point you to. We need to commit ourselves to the life-changing “Paradox Perspective” James is calling us to.

And it's not just those in poor and difficult circumstances. James also calls the rich and those in high circumstances to an upside down paradox perspective. He says to the poor, "Boast in your exalted position from God." He says to the rich, "Boast in your humbled (lowly) position.

James 1:10 (ESV)

10 and (let) the rich (boast) in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

The flip side perspective is James is calling the rich to boast in their being humbled by God. Take a look at some of the other translations.

James 1:10 (NLT)

10 And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them . . .

James 1:10 (AMP)

10 And the rich person ought to glory in being humbled [by being shown his human frailty] . . .

I especially like the NCV - James 1:10 (NCV)

10 Those who are rich should take pride that God has shown them that they are spiritually poor . . .

Those who are rich (in high circumstances) have the perspective of "being humbled" by God.

Why must the rich (those in high circumstances) have the perspective of "being humbled" by God? It's because riches (and high circumstances) are one of the most serious dangers to our relationship with God. But please hear me carefully; it is not the money *in and of itself*. It is not the high (easy) circumstances *in and of themselves*. It is our strong tendency to trust in the money and trust in our high (easy) circumstances that is the problem. And James is saying, warning, warning... if your perspective is determined by your money you may be in serious eternal danger.

All through the New Testament, over and over again, we are clearly warned trusting in riches and high earthly circumstances is a sure fire way to miss out on eternal life. And again, it not the money by itself... it's trusting in the money and trusting in the stuff that's going to keep you from eternal life. Why? Because trusting in money and stuff keeps you from seeing your desperate need for a Savior. The Church has always had a much easier time sharing Christ with the poor because they recognize their need. But when you go to a person who is trusting in their riches and high circumstances and you

say to them, “without God you are helpless and you are hopeless. You must come to God as a destitute beggar depending on him for your very life,” what you will often hear is “Security! Get this whack job out of here!” It’s because that person’s trust and dependence on their wealth has blinded them to their need for Jesus Christ.

The most famous example in the Bible is the rich young ruler. You have to read the story yourself; you can find it in Mark 10:17-27. A rich young man comes to Jesus and is certain he has everything necessary for eternal life. But Jesus sees right through him and knows he really trusts in his riches. And so Jesus tells him to sell everything he has, in order to show him the condition of his own heart. And Mark 10:22 says “***The Man went away SAD, because he had many possessions***” And then we read in the Amplified Bible:

Mark 10:24-25 (AMP) - Jesus says;

24 . . . how hard it is for those who trust (place their confidence, their sense of safety) in riches to enter the kingdom of God!

25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Not because of their riches alone, but because trusting in their riches blinds them to their desperate need for Christ.

In MAT 13:22 Jesus says;

the deceitfulness of riches choke out God’s Word in a person’s life

Jesus says - in the Famous Matthew 6:24 (NLT)

24 “No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

What’s the point? The point is those who are rich in this world must see themselves as spiritually poor. If they do not see themselves as spiritually poor their riches will blind them to their need for Christ and those riches will lead them to eternal destruction. And to help the rich see their true need for Christ, James uses a perfectly clear illustration.

James 1:10–11 (ESV)

10 and the rich (should boast) 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.

This illustration can help any person in high (rich) circumstances to correctly see their life. Your life is like a flower today, but it won't always be. Your circumstances may change in this life, or your life may end during these high circumstances. The point is, never, not ever, not for a moment can you trust in your riches.

Write in you margin Luke 12:13-21, parable of the rich fool. The rich fool has so much stuff he runs out of room for it and so he tears down his old barns and builds bigger barns for all his stuff. And we pick up the parable in Luke 12:19:

Luke 12:19–21 (NLT)

19 (Rich fool talking) And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"

20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?'

21 "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."

It's not that you can't have earthly wealth. It's that if that is what you're putting your trust in, you will end up eternally sorry. That's why Jesus said in Matthew 6 starting in verse 19:

Matthew 6:19–21 (ESV)

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth . . .

20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . .

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

It's because of the spiritual danger of riches. The Bible gives the rich very stern warnings:

#1) Boast in you desperate need for Christ

#2) Store up your treasures in heaven so that your heart will be there instead of here with your stuff.

So, James has issued a strong command for all of us to have a correct perspective. If you are in poor (lowly) circumstances boast in (glory in) God's exaltation of you.

If you are in rich (high) circumstances, boast in (glory in) your desperate need for Jesus Christ. It's a matter of correct perspective. And as we correct our own perspective we'll learn another spiritual secret to being able to "count it all joy" no matter what our circumstances are.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we need a correct perspective. We need it because it's part of what you're teaching us through James on how to have joy in the midst of our trials. Lord, if we are determining our perspective by our stuff, or by our money or by material blessings, then save us! Save us Lord from that faulty view and show us that we are rich in Christ, that our blessings are eternal. That they are reserved in Christ with you. That no matter what valley we are in you will never leave us or forsake us, that you'll lead us and guide us, that you'll walk with us, Lord. You are our life, we cannot lose Lord. Show us how to boast in who you are in us and what you've done in us and through us. And God if we are in that high place, if we have that money, then teach us Lord how to be afraid of it. And to recognize our spiritual poverty, to recognize our desperate need in you.

Lord we desire to have a correct perspective on our circumstances. And as we choose joy, and as we ask you in faith for your wisdom, and as we have a correct perspective on our circumstances, Lord, you will bring us through anything we face on this earth, until that day we see you face to face and share in all of your glory, Thank you, Jesus. It is in your name we pray, amen.