

ORIENTING TOWARD THE ETERNAL

An exposition of James 1:9-12
at West Hills San Jose on March 27, 2022

PASTORAL PRAYER: Holy, Righteous, Immortal God, who has been and always shall be, the Ruler of the Kings on earth, who has freed us from our sins by the blood of Christ, glorify your name in our midst. Draw our hearts toward heaven, and help us to rejoice in the great inheritance we have received in Christ. Thank you Lord for every good and perfect gift that flows down from your throne into our lives. Thank you for life, and breath and the ability to think and explore and see and comprehend, to give and receive love, to know and to be known. I pray for all people everywhere, that they would know what it means to be loved by you and to know Christ whom you have sent. Would you be stirring in the hearts of men and women everywhere to go out and make the name of Jesus known across the earth.

We pray for our many missionaries around the world. Especially Norris and Laurie Williams, would you use us and the many other church's who support them to meet every need as they minister to the many needs in many countries in the middle east. Would you encourage their hearts and strengthen their souls for the work, that they might serve you faithfully every day, and fulfill the work of an evangelist.

Lord we pray for the worship of your church around the world this morning. We pray that everywhere the gospel is preached, that Christ would be worshipped, believed and obeyed. We pray for your church in every place, would you sanctify her and make her holy by the washing of the water of the word. Would you cleanse our souls from all harmful and sinful thoughts, attitudes and actions...and bring us into a posture of humble submission, and eagerness to love.

Lord we pray particularly for our church, and I'm thinking this morning of our dear brother Scott Jung who is getting ready to marry his fiancé Jaclyn. We pray that you would bless them Lord, with a long and happy and Christ-filled marriage. We pray that as the move from the courtship phase the newlywed phase, that you keep them coming always and ever back to Christ as their foundation, and create in their home a picture of Christ and the church that is so beautiful and so compelling, that friends and neighbors and co-workers would be drawn to the glory of God through them. Do this Lord by your eternal power we ask.

And finally we pray for our time together as a body this morning: would your Mighty Spirit come and minister through your word now. Would you help us to hear with soft hearts, to believe with an eager willingness, to be instructed with a humility of mind and to respond with zeal for your name. We love you Lord, help us to love you more and more, with all of our hearts, our minds, our souls and our strength, we ask in Jesus name, amen.

PROBLEM: Well grace and peace West Hills, as always it is my honor and privilege to get to open the Word with you this morning and share with you what I have received from Christ in His word this week. And I want to begin our time with a simple question, that I don't want you to answer too quickly: I want you to hear the question, and then think about it. Ready: how much of your life, is focused on things that will last forever? Are you oriented toward that which is eternal? Or to ask that another way, how much of your life is geared towards doing things that you know are important to God? You and I wake up every day, and walk out our front doors, and

find ourselves in the midst of a mighty cultural river, with a powerful intellectual current that pulls on your hearts and minds relentlessly, always and ever towards the domain of temporal concerns. We are pulled towards some vision of the successful life, propped up by marketing, and media and the never failing promises of our flesh, that to just have more, will be to have enough. More in my career. More in my relationships. More in my leisure time, more opportunity to travel. More for my kids, more for my savings account, a better car, a better house, a better job a better spouse...will be the thing that brings completion and satisfaction and rest to my life. Many of you hear that, and you know with your head that it's not true...and yet you are like the rest of us in that you feel its tug.

And as you battle that tug you remember other times in your Christian life, where you didn't feel that tug nearly as much. When your heart was undivided and your devotion to Christ was clear. And you ask yourself, I am still as oriented toward that which is eternal? Or does the busyness of my life make it too difficult to live with an undivided devotion to God?

Early in my Christian life I felt like I had lots of space to do things all the time that obviously mattered forever. I could have spontaneous prayer meetings with brothers in my community group, drum up conversations with strangers about the gospel at Starbucks and interact into the late hours of the night. And I could do that because I didn't really have important places to be, or people waiting for me, or appointments I need to get to, or little kids at home waiting anxiously for daddy to come back. I'm now in a new phase in my life, where we are having to rethink how we prioritize Christ and His mission in the business of child-rearing. But one of the things I'm seeing, is that in every phase of life, whether young, or medium or older, is the issue is not about the limitations God brings on your opportunity to minister it's about whether or not your heart is oriented toward the eternal, and looking to redeem all you do for the glory of Christ. And you can do that when you are busy, just like you can do it when you aren't busy, as long as you are thinking about it, caring about it, concerned to it, because your heart is fixed on, oriented towards those things which last forever, regardless of your phase of life. This I believe is James' main point today, and I think it is beautifully summed up in a lyric from CT Studd's famous poem on the one life we've been given on earth...main point:

MAIN POINT: Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Please open your bibles to the book of James, we will be picking up where we left off in James chapter 1 verse 9, and let me very quickly recalibrate us to the context. This book was written by James the brother of the Lord Jesus, who didn't believe that His brother was the Messiah until His brother appeared to him after the resurrection. As a consequence, James was raised up from unbelief to belief through the gospel, and now has a unique insight into the grace that God has shown the world and especially to him. And James became one of the prominent leaders of the Christian church in Jerusalem where he ministered. And as the gospel went out into the world, a time came where it became important to record and disseminate his teaching to a wider audience. And so here in his letter we have a collection of his exhortations describing what it looks like to live with an undivided devotion to Christ.

In the first two weeks we have seen that the letter begins with a call to rejoice in the midst of trial because of what we know God uses trials for. I then suggested last week that the

theme of preserving under trials continued through the passage on wisdom, as wisdom was essential to persevering through trials according to first century Jewish literature. We discussed faith and doubt in the God who saves us, and how that relates to our expectations of Him and His readiness to answer us in prayer. And as we continue through this passage we will see that James is continuing to discuss trials and testing...and in particular how it relates to what our hearts are oriented towards in this life and how that shapes what we should expect as we prepare to face God in judgment. Let's now humble our minds and prepare our hearts for the reading of the Word of the Lord...

READING: [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. [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. (James 1:9-12)

PRAYER: God help us to hear and to receive your Word meekly implanted as that which can save our souls.

ROAD MAP: I want to unpack with you three things from this passage. I want to think about how the passage teaches us to 1.) See with new eyes, 2.) How to think about chasing impermanence, 3.) Orienting ourselves toward the eternal.

SEEING WITH NEW EYES

1. So this book has opened with a series of radical calls to look at everything differently. **You should first think about your trials differently.** Instead of lamenting because of your trials of various kinds, you should rejoice as you encounter them because through them God is forming you into something glorious.
2. Additionally, you shouldn't just think about your trials differently **you should think about God differently.** As you go through temptation...God isn't looking at us with a disgusted indifference going how are you struggling with this again...ugh?!? No He is a God who gives wisdom generously without reproach...He meets us in our weakness with a smile of compassion on his face. We think to ourselves...ugh but I'm so sinful. To which James replies...brother...sister...He is SO SO SO GRACIOUS. He wants to give generously. You need to think about God differently.
3. And now today James is going to challenge our perception of the blessed life. He is going to invite us to recast our vision of the successful well lived life. And we need to think about that by engaging the most confusing and controversial question of our text...namely...who exactly is a James contrasting in verse 9.
4. Everyone agrees that the first person is a lowly or humbled Christian who ought to exult in the station God has given them...but then he contrasts that person with the "RICH" who ought to boast in their humiliation. And then he goes on to describe the sorry state of the rich person. Is that a lowly Christian and a rich Christian? Or a lowly Christian and all rich

people christian or non-christian. And in typical Jamesian fashion, he is more interested in painting with a broad brush than speaking with carefully qualified specifics. Remember as we discussed last week, James is more interested in pointing the way for most people in most places...NOT offering a hyper detailed examination of all the potential counter examples that someone might come up with.

5. But the way we interpret this is important because it has some pretty significant ramifications. Is James saying, that all rich people ought to be humiliated because they are rich? There are a lot of smart people who read it that way. There may be some of you who read it that way. Or is this comparing the lowly Christian with a certain KIND of rich person? The literature is split on this issue and it's difficult to hold to a dogmatic position. But I'm going to argue the latter, that James has in mind a certain kind of rich person.
6. One of the things that advocates of the first view will point out is that in James 5, there is going to be another pretty radical condemnation laid upon the rich who oppress their workers and practice deception and injustice. James seems to be critical of the rich and we should let the latter statement influence our reading here. But there are actually kind of a lot of problems with reading it this way...as a blanket condemnation of all rich people everywhere.
 1. The first one is that in the OT, which is James' primary book of reference...wealth is almost always considered a blessing, and almost never looked at as a synonym for wickedness. It's not that it's never looked at that way...it's just far more rare than the contrary. It seems like a faithful Jew would want to say a little more if he was issuing a full on condemnation of something that God in the OT repeatedly calls a blessing.
 2. Second, James chapter 5 isn't the only thing James says to the wealthy. In chapter 4 he describes the merchant in verse 13 who is tempted to say "Today or tomorrow will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit." I know that that passage doesn't use the word rich...but who talks like that? The world isn't that different. "I'm going to fly to Rome and try and sell our commodities with the expectation of a two percent increase in quarterly earnings." That has never ever been the language of the poor.
 3. In that passage, James is far more concerned that that person is focused on God and God's will in the midst of his pursuits instead of boasting in their arrogance. In other words, the problem he has with them doesn't seem to be the wealth itself but their attitude about success and so forth.
 4. Third, the rest of the bible never condemn the rich just because they are rich. Of course Christ acknowledges it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle...but then he follows that statement up with the claim that with man this is impossible but with God all things are possible. He doesn't say they need to abandon their wealth. He says they need the all powerful God to make this possible. Paul in 1 Timothy 6 has a lot to say to the wealthy, including warning against the love of money. But his exhortation is not to abandon your wealth but to resist the temptation to hope in your wealth rather than the God who gives us our true inheritance.
 5. Finally, last point, I think the passage itself clarifies that James has a certain kind of rich person in mind...verse 11 he is thinking of the of the rich guy who will fade in the midst

of his meaningless pursuits. We will unpack that in more detail in a few minutes. My point is simply to say...I don't think James is attacking godly Christians who are wealthy but use that wealth to serve the Lord.

1. He doesn't have a faithful, repentant, humbled Zaccheus in mind, who was ready and willing to use his wealth for Christ no matter what that might mean. He has in mind a certain kind of rich person...who is not focused on what matters...but on the accumulation and maintenance of his earthly riches to the neglect of his own soul.
6. So is this rich person a Christian or not...it's really hard to say...but I think the fact that James is warning this person...suggests that he expects this person to hear this in church. It seems likely than to me...that James has in mind, christian Jews scattered abroad who have not fully accepted the social and financial ramifications for fully identifying with Christ and his persecuted people.
7. For the Jews to leave Israel and disperse throughout the Roman empire...they already had to live as outsiders. They didn't participate in the roman religious rituals or eat the food that was sacrificed to idols. There were so many parts of normal life...where they chose to remain social outsiders. And then those Jews who were already social outsiders...who decided to become Christians to the ire of their fellow Jews would have been doubly outcast.
8. And so it seems to me that they were just like us...in that they were still working out what an undivided loyalty to Christ and His people meant, and James here is offering the very helpful, very clear directive for them and for us. Devotion to Christ means letting that devotion shape what we pursue in this life.
7. So that was kind of a lot of work to make what I think is a very important point...that the person who is lowered and in the midst of trials of various kinds ought to glory in their exaltation before God, ESPECIALLY if those trials have come as a consequence of being a Christian...and the person who has it all, who is living their best life now, that is unconcerned with the suffering of Christ and His people ought to be embarrassed. James uses the word humiliation.
8. He ought to glory in or boast in his humiliation. And you're thinking...whoa...that's hardcore. That's an intense thing to say to someone who is just trying to make a profit and run a business or whatever. But you have to appreciate that that is a worldly lens through which to see the world. It's the world who tells you to focus on yourself and your own happiness and to reject and avoid people that interrupt your own personal pursuits. It's the Lord Jesus who tells you to take up a cross and follow him into a life of sacrificial love and giving. It's the world who tells you it's more blessed to receive than to give...and it's the world who tells you that YOU are the problem when none of these attitudes or actions bring satisfaction to your soul.
1. James is offering you a new set of spectacles as an act of grace. He is trying to help you...see the world as it really is...to feel the world as it is meant to be felt...and to experience actual repentance and contrition for the sins we have embraced and participated in.
9. If you are living a selfish self-centered life...you ought to embrace that humiliating reality and repent of it. How do you do that? Well you don't pray Lord I'm sorry that I'm rich. That

misses the point. The prayer is Lord, I'm sorry that I've been so focused on myself instead of loving and serving others. Lord I'm sorry that my heart has been directed towards the things that will only last for a lifetime rather than towards the things that will last forever.

10. Jesus says in Matthew 25, the analogy of the sheep and the goats. He says to the sheep, you saw me hungry, and poor, and in prison and you fed me and helped me and visited me. And the sheep ask, when did we do that Lord? To which he replies as you did it to the least of these my brothers...you did it to me. He then says to the goats...you also saw me in all kinds of needs also BUT you refused to help me...to which the goats reply...when did we do that Lord? To which Christ responded as you did NOT do it, to the least of these...you did NOT DO IT...to me.
 1. In other words...if you have been living a life focused on yourself, your business, your personal goals, your own ambitions...to the NEGLECT of your brothers and sisters who are in need...YOU HAVE BEEN IGNORING CHRIST. That's why this is so urgent to James. That's why he can call this way of life a state of humiliation. When Christ comes and strips all things away...what you have been doing will be revealed for it really was and is...and it will be your humiliation if you live your life this way.
11. NOW ON THE OTHER HAND...there are many among us who have been lowered through various life circumstances, and who have sought to be faithful to Christ through your trials of various kinds. James says to you...that you brother, sister, ought to glory in, or boast in, or revel in, or take great comfort and joy in, your exaltation. Your high status. There is a day coming for you also...where the appearance of things will be stripped away...and what you have been doing will be revealed for what it really is...and you ought to rejoice.
 1. One of the hardest things to do in the midst of trial...is to see the world through this lens. That in this test God is refining my faith...He is producing steadfastness in me...through this he is raising me up through grace...and preparing for me a weight of glory far beyond all comparison.
 2. James want us to embrace Jeremiah 9:23-24, to cease boasting in wisdom, or strength or riches...but to boast in this. That we KNOW God, the God who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth. James wants us to embrace the full implications of the gospel, That in Christ we have received everything heaven can give, an imperishable inheritance, new life, the hope of resurrection and glory. And that through Christ...literally NOTHING can separate us from His love.
 3. These are the new eyes you are offered. This is the new and right side up way of looking at the world. That to live a wealthy, prosperous selfish self-centered life is a humiliation, and to willingly embrace a lower place in the world for the sake of Christ is a glory.

Embracing this, in faith, is to begin to see the world through new eyes. Let's now transition to the folly of chasing impermanence

CHASING IMPERMANENCE

1. There is something kind of chillingly brief about the second half of verse 10 and verse 11. The rich person should revel in their humiliation BECAUSE...everything he is living for is impermanent. Because like a flower of the grass he will pass away.

2. Every time spring rolls around...and you see the flowers bloom on the trees, and in the grass...you are being invited to consider what the Lord has said. That like these flowers... you will have your moment in the sun...and then you will fade and pass away.
3. Verse 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 person fade away in the midst of his pursuits.
4. You and I are going to work as hard as we can at our respective callings, we will do what we can with what we have to create a life that is good and meaningful according to our perception of what that word means...and then we will age...and the years will wear upon us...until our bodies fail and our systems break down to the point that they can no longer be fixed. And then we will die...and someone will put our body inside a box...and they will put that box into a hole...and they will cover it with earth.
5. And our loved ones will cry...and our friends will share a laugh at old stories...and then the world will keep right on going without us. Unless the Lord returns first...that is the fate of every single one of us in this room. That has been true of every human who has ever lived with 100% efficacy. And the only question for James is...how will that truth inform your life today?
6. It is the most natural thing in the world...to get swept away by the currents of earthly concerns. There is something so chilling about the vague word "pursuits". The rich man will fade away in the midst of his pursuits. It's not like he's caught up with a bunch of horrible sinful things. It's that he's completely oriented toward temporal things. Passing things. Things that will not last forever.
7. And for James...there is only one life...it will soon be past...and only what's done for Christ will last. And it's worth stopping and asking yourself...what am I pursuing in life right now?
 1. What am I using my time and energy and money to try and accomplish? We are all doing something with our time and money and energy...what are you pursuing right now in your life? Every time football season starts again for my sons, I have to remind my heart and mind of this very thing. The most important thing is not that they would win.
 2. Winning is like the flower of the grass. The most important thing about playing sports are the things that will last forever. Is the love of God informing how you treat your coaches your teammates and the other team. Are you learning to be gracious in victory and thankful in defeat.
 3. The most important thing in your job is not your career staying on track or achieving your professional goals. It's that you are learning to trust Christ in the midst of those pursuits, are you expressing your loyalty to Christ in the context of your professional relationships, and are you prepared to associate yourself with the Lord Jesus even if that means introducing trials of various kinds into your life.
 4. I'm not saying go create problems I'm saying...go focus on what lasts forever.
8. Here is my POINT...don't go fade away in the midst of your pursuits. Don't live for things that will not last. What will last are your choices and actions that are aimed at the glory of God and the good of our neighbor. What will last are worship, and community and mission. What will last are the works you do as an offering to your God whether anyone sees or understands them at all.

What will pass away will be the things we pursue for ourselves without regard for God or others. Verse 11 says the rich man will fade away in the midst of HIS PURSUITS. He isn't pursuing things of God...but the things of his own self interest. What are you pursuing? SO what have we seen?

We have seen that in the Lord Jesus we are to have a new perspective on the world. To embrace trials in faith is success. To go pursue financial success without concern for God and God's will is an embarrassment. And the reason for this...is that that which is temporal will quickly fade and disappear. And people who live for those things will soon fade and disappear. And therefore, we ought to orient ourselves to those things which will last forever. Let's now close by looking at that in verse 12.

ORIENTING TOWARD THE ETERNAL

1. James says blessed is the man, happy, or joyful will be the man who remains steadfast under trial. Why? For when he has stood the test...HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE which God has promised to those who love Him.
2. James utters a statement of blessing, a confirmation of happiness over the person who remains steadfast under trial. What trial exactly? Probably trials of various kinds as we saw in verse 2. He is talking about things that come into our lives to test our faith.
 1. These are things that happen that tempt us...to forsake our trust and hope and dependance upon God and to turn to lower or even sinful things to save us, or sustain us, or to be our hope.
 2. The first REAL trial of my marriage with Jeanine was when we were newly weds, and we moved here immediately after getting married. And I was a full time student with no money. And Jeanine got a job at a non-profit to be our sole source of income apart from my student loans. And a month into the job of keeping the books, it became apparent that there was some shady stuff going on. And when Jeanine confronted the head of the corporation about it, he got super upset and accusatory and weird.
 3. And when that happened...it became super obvious...well that's not the language of the innocent. So what are we going to do? We don't have any money, our only source of this money is from this job...but what is happening at this job is sinful. What should we do? And it's easy from the outside looking in to go just quit, get another job. But when you are 23 and newly married and you've never "just quit" anything before...that's really scary. It was a test. We prayed and we prayed. And one evening after praying Jeanine looked up at me and said you need to lead our family and make a decision.
 4. And with much agony of soul...I said I think you should quit. And so she did. And God in his mercy and kindness provided another, better job within a month. And my faith was strengthened forever.
 5. When James says blessed is the one who has stood the test...I don't think he has one isolated test in mind. I think he has a lifetime of trusting God in the face of testing or temptation. Trusting God...rather than money. Trusting God to care for us in the way of holiness...rather than to make peace with the way of sin because it's easier.
3. Living for God like that...is better than a living a self-absorbed life in the pursuit of personal gain, do you know why? Because for those who live that way God will give the crown of life

that He has promised to those who are faithful and who love Him. In this passage...the crown is life. Eternal life. Life that can never be extinguished or taken away.

4. This isn't a tin foil ornament for your head...this is the gift of immortality in the resurrection. And this crown is held out to all of you. All who would live with an undivided heart for Christ.
5. There is a lot I could say about this verse but I think it's more helpful to keep my comments brief and just let the point hang. This isn't calling you to a life without struggles. Remaining steadfast under trial isn't easy...it's hard. It's fraught with failure and repentance and resolve in the gospel to keep striving to live for him.
 1. Remaining steadfast under trials is NOT FORSAKING YOUR HOPE IN JESUS. Not forsaking Him, but drawing near to Him when you fall. Drawing near to him when the storms of life come crashing in. Drawing near to Him in humble dependence when life unfolds in a way that feels deeply unfair.
 2. Paul models this steadfastness in Phil 3:7-8 saying "Whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ."
 3. That is a picture of being deeply oriented toward that which is eternal. That is saying...temporal things are of very small consequence in light of what I can gain in this world in Christ. I would rather have Christ than all the money in all the banks in all the world. I would rather have Christ than a spouse, than a house than a car than a mouse...it's not that those things don't matter...it's just that Christ matters so so so much more.
6. Blessed and happy is the person who lives this way...because they will receive life everlasting. If you are thinking...but I feel weak. I don't feel like I do what this passage is saying. The fact is...you are right. The point isn't that you will generate enough strength to stand fast...it's that God is using these experiences to make you stronger and more complete verse 3.
 1. What we are called to do is to keep trusting him. To keep repenting when we fall. Bringing our sins to the cross of the Lord Jesus and saying forgive my sins and heal me in your grace. I am weak, but you are strong, help me.
 2. If you don't know what to do with this, if you lack wisdom, you should pray to God who gives generously to all without reproach. If you lack faith...come back to the gospel...come back to the rock of your salvation and plant yourself firmly in the death and resurrection of Jesus as your hope...don't look into yourself...look away from yourself and unto Christ. There is peace...there is hope...there is forgiveness...there is strength in the hour of temptation.
7. For those of you who came to church this morning in the place of lowliness. Rejoice and boast in your exaltation. For those of you who came to church awash in the midst of your pursuits. Repent and come to Jesus and allow him to set you right on the way of holiness. If you came to church this morning in the midst of a trial...don't lose sight of what is before you...God has promised for the one who remains steadfast...you will receive the crown of life. Letting go will set you adrift into the midst of vain pursuits. But remaining with Jesus will keep you oriented toward what will last forever.

There is only one life, twill soon be past, and only what's done for Christ will last. Let's pray

COMMUNION: