

Rich And Poor

James 1:9-12

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 (ESV))

Here in these words, God is asking you and me to consider more than just our having an adequate amount of money to meet our daily needs, He is asking us to consider the “attitude” we have towards our condition. And today, if we will allow ourselves to give these words some “spiritual thought”, and allow the Holy Spirit to minister to our spirit, we might find out some truths that we have not considered before.

. . . May we begin our study today by asking ourselves the simple questions, “What do we think of the living conditions and the lifestyle that we find ourselves in today? Are we happy, satisfied and contented with who we are, and where we are in life?”

May I remind us that the Apostle James is a no-nonsense, get-straight-to-the-point kind of messenger from God. And that is the manner in which these considerations are being given to us. God intends for you and me to confront our own selves with these kinds of questions.

And so, may we ask these questions again? How do you “feel” about your own personal financial condition right at this moment? Are you satisfied and content with the amount of money you have in your bank account? What about your house? Is it nice enough? What about your car, your truck, those clothes you are wearing? Is your jewelry real? Is the stone in your ring as big as you would like it to be?

And while we are considering our own financial condition, what is our attitude towards the way that other people live as compared to ourselves. When you observe other people, especially those you know to have more money than you, do you envy them? Do you despise them? And what about those “other people”, the ones who obviously have less than you, do you think less of them because that live in that “other” part of town?

While we are asking these questions about ourselves, may we ask another one? What do you think that other people think about you and your lifestyle and your living conditions? Do you think that they think you are rich or that you are poor, or perhaps somewhere in between?

We can't, of course, know what other people are thinking about us, and you would probably protest strongly that you don't really care what other people think about you. But may I assure you that you do! You really do care what other people think about you, about the way you look, your clothes, your hair, your truck.

May I confess to you that while I love the pickup truck that I have right now, I really don't like its color. Why? It's because it is the standard color of the U. S. Forestry Department, one that they cycled out and sold to the public. And because I know that most men know that it is an old Forestry Department truck, that puts a "taint" on my acceptance of the color of the truck. And that is silly of me, and probably to some degree even borders on sinfulness. But is that response any different than my liking to wear Carhartt pants, or always having my hair cut properly?

The truth is, there are a lot of emotions that go into our dealing with the way we live each day, and not only the basics of it, do we have enough food, or adequate clothing or good transportation. But it has just as much to do with what we "think" and feel about our finances, and especially what other people think about us.

Now, I want you to know that I know that to some degree, you are probably protesting the things I am saying. And it may be true that some of the things I have spoken about may not be true for you. But folks, some of them are. That is why God addresses money and the things of lifestyle in so many ways in so many places in these scriptures. These things really do matter to us. And we ought to address them in the way that God want us to address them.

May we start by looking as some of the things God has to say to us about these things? In Matthew 6, when speaking about the basic necessities of life, Jesus said,

31 . . . do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:31-34 (NKJV))

Note in those words that it is not just a matter of our “having” enough of the basic necessities of life, it is also the “worrying” that Jesus is most concerned about.

One basic truth that prevails is that there are very few people among us that are truly confident and happy and satisfied with their financial condition. And it doesn't really matter which side of the “cultural divide” a person finds themselves on, wealthy or “dirt poor”. The poor, suffering in their poverty, and wanting desperately to have more, while the rich, somewhat in the same vein, can never seem to have enough. Bottom line . . . most people are “unsatisfied” with the amount of money they have in the bank.

A friend of mine often quoted his father's response when his father would be asked by someone about how much money he made. His father's response was always, “not enough”, “never enough”.

Unfortunately, it seems that to one degree or another, most all people are caught up in those concerns and dilemmas about the amount of money they have or they make, some even to the point of being utterly consumed with the need or desire for more. And again, the it does not matter what level of wealth a person is at.

Jesus addressed that intense desire for more money and the things that money can buy, using the word “mammon”. “Mammon” is a word that implies not only the idea of “money”, but it also implies all the “high-life” that wealth can provide, the lifestyle, the importance, power and position that comes with having more money. And it also implies the “desire” that resides within a person's heart, a desire that is so strong that it becomes a “master” to us, dictating the things we do.

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus speaks about the conflict that arises within a person's soul who is caught up in the desire for “mammon”. Listen! These words also from Matthew 6,
24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? 28 So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; 29 and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and

tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (Matthew 6:24-30 (NKJV))

And in Matthew 16, verse 24 Jesus said

24 . . . to His disciples, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. 25 "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matthew 16:24-27 (NASB))

Note in all these words that Jesus is putting this matter of our desires for more money into perspective as it involves our relationship with Him . . . for today and on out into eternity.

And that is so also in our text for today,

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 (ESV))

It is no coincidence that these exhortations given here regarding our perspectives on wealth and poverty immediately follow along from the commands and warnings that we have been studying regarding the "trials of our faith". The "linking together" of the two is intentional on the part of the Lord. That is because a person's financial condition really does have such a strong and immediate impact on the daily life of every person, rich or poor, and also consequently upon that person's daily walk with the Lord.

And again, there are financial needs at all levels of poverty and of wealth, and if at any time any of those limits get tested, then so do the anxiety levels. And perspective will dictate most every response. And if a person's perspective is wrong then the trials and the testing of their faith will surely escalate.

Probably not many of us in this church can relate closely to the anxieties of the truly wealthy, but we can relate to those of the poor. And my heart goes out to those who find it necessary to frequent the "check advance" and "title loan" businesses in our town.

Those businesses have a thriving flow of customers, all suffering from the problems of a lack of money. And their financial problems are very real. They have gotten behind and can't seem to work their way out of it.

As for the dilemmas and anxieties of the wealthy, my only personal understanding of their financial plights came during the most recent recession when I watched as the investments in my retirement account dropped about 30%.

Again, whether we are rich or we are poor, our financial condition has a strong impact on the way we conduct the matters of our daily life. And we worry and we fret. But God is telling us that there is another factor that we too often leave out of our considerations about money. And that other factor is Him! God! He is our loving Father. And He has a desire and a plan for every part of our life, for today, for tomorrow, and for eternity. And He is telling us, that if we will just trust in Him, He really will make adequate daily provision for us.

But in His provision, He doesn't just want us to be fed and clothed. He wants you and me to "exult" in the way that we are fed and clothed. And He wants us to be satisfied with His provision. And He wants us to always know that it was Him who provided it.

And so, may I ask you, are you right at this moment satisfied, happy and contented with the provision that God has made for you, so much so that you can "boast" about His provision? If you are not, then may I say to you, on the authority of these words, that you have a problem, not with your finances, but with the Lord Himself.

Does that sound harsh or condemning. I don't mean for it too. But may I assure you, it is true.

When we are able to make the transition from depending solely upon our own self and our own wits to meet our daily financial needs and we begin to have a dependence upon God and His provision, then mysterious things will begin to take place. God has ways of meeting our needs that we would not otherwise think of.

But His provision carries with it an important codicil. He wants us to respond to His provision with thankfulness and exaltation, each in our own way, the rich and the poor. Listen again.

9 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, 10 and the rich in his humiliation,
(James 1:9 (ESV))

Both the rich and the poor need to always remember from whence their provision comes and to give back glory and honor to God our “Provider”.

May I say again before we close that our financial provisions and problems are all a part of the many conditions that can come our way in the daily “testing of our faith”, for both the poor and for the rich. And yes, assuredly, your own faith will be tested in this way many times. So, as financial stress does come your way, may encourage and exhort you to

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding;

6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

(Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV))

12 Blessed is the man (and woman) 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 (ESV))

May I close with a special quote from the book “Future Grace”, by John Piper! It is particularly applicable to the intent of these scriptures. The quote is this, “God is most glorified in us, when we are most satisfied in Him”.

Amen! Let’s pray.