

Introduction

Are you distressed about the price of gas this morning? In the last two years we have witnessed I think the greatest wave of gasoline price change ever within the time period. Remember in 2020 when you could fuel up for .89/gallon? And just this week I bought it for 3.99/gallon. And I guess it is going to keep going up. Fuel prices are going to have a ripple effect as everything we consume is affected by transportation costs. It is really going to be a test for Christians these days, a test to reveal how much we love the world, whether our lives are defined by our material prosperity and enjoyments. When it comes to trials, money and wealth, or the lack thereof, may be one of the greatest tests of faith. Do we love God or do we love the world? The poor are tempted to be jealous and envious for what they wish they possessed. The wealthy are tempted to program their lives according to an insatiable desire for more. James perceived the trouble. And so in the midst of a discussion of trials he set his attention on poverty and wealth.

[Read Text and Pray]

James's audience was well-acquainted with trials. The time of his writing was a little over a decade after Jesus's resurrection. Persecution against Christ's followers was intense. Difficult trials were an inescapable reality. This burden weighed heavily on the heart of James from the outset of his letter. While he addresses corresponding matters, it is apparent that James's focus on trials proceeds from verse 2 all the way to verse 12. In verses 5-8 James addresses the need for wisdom and how to receive it, but that is because wisdom is essential for being able to count trials as joy and for knowing how to navigate them well. As we look this morning to verses 9-11, we see that James addresses poverty and wealth, but again he is not scatter-brained. It seems rather a case of reiteration by application. James is applying the principle of counting it as joy when you meet trials to two specific examples of trials. So this is not a new teaching or an unrelated teaching but the same teaching brought to bear directly upon two very real though opposite trials. He is showing how the principle he has taught applies in two particular kinds of trials. So the message this morning is in some ways a repetition or a reiteration. When we were studying verses 2-4, I said that James told us what we need to know about trials and what we need to do about them. The same content is here in verses 9-11. James tells us what to do because of what we know about two trials that are opposite kinds of experience but both related to wealth. We learn that the key to joy in the midst of trial is to see beneath the surface of our experience to the eternal reality.

The eternal reality is that . . .

I. The Kinds of Trials are Two.

James exhorts two kinds of brothers here. One is lowly and the other is rich. One is poor and the other is wealthy. He is specifically addressing two opposite sets of circumstances as relates to material wealth. The lowly brother has little; the rich has a lot. The one is experiencing an absence of wealth and the other is experiencing an abundance. And in the context of trials, both ends of the wealth spectrum are tests of faith. Hard times, disappointments, and sorrows are certainly instances in which our faith in Christ is put to the test. And yet, faith in Christ is also put to the test in pleasant times, occasions of dreams come true, and success. These may be trials in sheep's clothing, but they are trials nonetheless.

So one thing we learn from James here is that trials are of these two kinds. They are trials of absence and abundance, poverty and plenty, failure and success. We all easily recognize that

absence and poverty and failure are times of trial. They are generally accompanied by the temptation to be sorrowful, disappointed, and fearful. They cut against the grain of happiness. Any enemy to our happiness is clearly seen as an opponent, and we naturally will see ourselves in a trial when standing opposite a foe. The clear time of testing for Job was when he lost everything, for Abraham it was when he was told to go and offer his son as a sacrifice. It was a test for Daniel when the king issued a law against prayer to any god but the king and threatened to throw any violator into the lions' den. It was clearly a test for Joseph when his brothers sold him into slavery, when he was falsely accused, and when he waited for years for a freed cupbearer to remember him in prison. These times of testing were abundantly obvious as such.

But what about the testing of success and prosperity? Adam and Eve were put to the test in just such a situation. They were placed in a garden planted by God with nothing but joy and provision and beauty and without shame. But their faith was put to the test in the midst of abundance. They refused to be satisfied with the bounty of God's provision. Joseph most assuredly was put to the test when he was placed in power in Egypt. It was a test of his faith when those evil brothers showed up at his doorstep. The church at Laodicea was tested by its prosperity and became lukewarm. Solomon's faith was also put to the test in the midst of peace and plenty. He wanted for nothing, but in the end his heart went after foreign women. Poverty is definitely a test of faith, but so is prosperity. In poverty one is tested as to whether he will continue to trust God when times are tough. And in prosperity one is tested whether he will continue to hold fast to the Lord or delight in the possessions and pleasant circumstances he has bestowed.

The contrast presented by James is an example which applies to more than just money and material wealth. There are a number of contrasts in life where the extreme ends of trials are apparent. Disappointment is on one end while hope fulfilled is on the other. On one end is sickness and on the other is excellent health. On one end is loneliness and on the other is companionship. On one end is a marriage cut short by bereavement and on the other is a long marriage lasting to old age. Unemployment is on one end while on the other is more than enough work. It is absence set against abundance. And each one sets before us a test of faith.

At issue in either case is whether we are going to hold on to God. Do we love God above all things? Will we have the attitude of Job—"The Lord gives and the Lord takes away, Blessed be the name of the Lord"? But we must be ready to face trials of both kinds because we have and we will—trials of poverty and trials of plenty; trials of absence and trials of abundance; trials of pain and trials of what's pleasant.

II. The Key Is Boasting.

A. James writes, "Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation." Whether you are in a trial on the painful end or on the pleasant end, the key is the same. Let us boast. For the most part in scripture boasting is not a good thing. Boasting is the key to a prideful downturn. However, as James is using the word it is a very good thing. It all comes down to why and in what you are boasting.

The Lord speaks through Jeremiah and says in chapter 9:23 and 24, "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord." Truth be told you boast in something. You put your hope in something. You

find meaning and delight in something. You seek something above everything else. It all comes down to what you hope in, what you delight in, and what is your confidence.

Actually the word here that James uses for boast is probably better translated by the NASB and the NKJV which use the word GLORY or the KJV which uses the word REJOICE. What James is saying here corresponds to his earlier exhortation to consider it all joy. He is saying that the follower of Christ is to exult in his trials. Commentator Curtis Vaughan says that the word for boast means to "find triumphant joy and satisfaction." What you glory in or what you exult in is that in which you find triumphant joy and deep satisfaction. It is what thrills and gratifies your soul.

The bottom line here is that the thing to do in trials—whether they are trials of plenty or trials of poverty, trials of abundance or trials of absence, trials of prosperity or trials of pain—the thing to do is not to complain and be depressed and distressed. The thing to do is to exult. It is to glory. It is to find deep and satisfying joy. Now the question is, "How?" How can I be deeply satisfied when times are exceedingly tough. And how can I be deeply satisfied in a right sense when my cup is literally running over? It all comes down to what you glory in, what you exult in or what you boast in.

B. And on the painful end of trials James says to boast in one thing and on the pleasant end he says to boast in something else. The brother or sister of humble circumstances is told to boast in their exaltation. The brother or sister in wealthy circumstances is instructed to glory in their humiliation. Opposite kinds of testing correspond to opposite kinds of exulting.

The use of the word brother here indicates that these instructions are specifically for those who belong to the family of faith. Remember that James was the half-brother of Jesus. He was the son of Joseph and Mary and grew up in the same household as Jesus. However, when he introduces himself to his readers, what does he call himself? Up in verse 1 he says he is a SERVANT of God and of Christ Jesus the Lord. Though he was born into the earthly family of Jesus, he recognizes that there is another far greater family than that of biological relation. There is a spiritual relation of family among those who become SERVANTS of the Lord Jesus Christ. So when James uses the term brother here, he is drawing attention to the close and affectionate connection that exists between fellow servants of Christ. We are family. We who repent of sin and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are children of God. We are brothers and sisters. We are family. And we share in an inheritance that is unspeakable. I just love the way Peter describes it. This is 1 Peter 1 beginning with verse 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christy from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." This is an inheritance of exalted proportions. It corresponds to the change in position for all who come to faith in Christ.

God gives grace to the humble who put their faith and hope in His Son. He lifts them up. He delivers them from the "domain of darkness and" transfers them "to the kingdom of his beloved Son." Those who once were under the dominion of the prince of the power of the air will reign with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12). These who once were without hope and without God now are brought near by the Blood of Christ. Once they were strangers and outcasts but in Christ they have become fellow citizens with the saints. Once they were not God's people but now they are the people of God. Once they had not received mercy but now we have received the mercy of God. We are a people for God's own loving possession. And as Paul says in Romans 8, "the sufferings of this present time are

not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. All the good that God is and all the good he has to give belongs to all whose faith is in Christ Jesus.

It is knowing God, receiving forgiveness, redemption, riches of glory, righteousness, comfort, purity, peace, joy, love, kindness, protection, security, and the high and exalted position of belonging to the royal family. It is being like our king. As John writes, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared: but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." In Christ, there is no condemnation. In Christ, we have been raised to newness of life. In Christ we are set free. This is exaltation! This is the humble and lowly being lifted up. This is what James speaks of when he tells the brother of lowly circumstances to glory in his exaltation.

If your heart is set on the things of this world, you are blind to the glories of which the Bible speaks. These are true glories, eternal glories. These blessings for believers were purchased by Christ Jesus upon the cross. God who did not spare his own son, will certainly give all good things to those for whom his son died. And they are those who come to Christ as Lord and Savior from the blight and ugliness and criminality of their sins. The end of the age will be marked by the humiliation and eternal destruction of the wicked and unrepentant and the exaltation of those who turn from sin and trust in Christ. As I appeal every week, I appeal right now to those without Christ to come to him. Turn away from a life sinful rebellion against God and trust in Christ Jesus today! Receive Christ's forgiveness and become his joint-heir. Join the company of those who are and will be forever exalted in Christ. That is the glory in which the poor brother is to exult.

When in painful trials, look beyond them to the blessed hope. Fix your eyes on Christ and the glorious exaltation which belongs to you in him.

Meanwhile, when in trials on the opposite end of the spectrum, glory in your humiliation. This is a strange exhortation. It is certainly strange to my ears. Glory in your humiliation? James is speaking to the wealthy brother. There probably weren't a whole lot of wealthy brothers in that day, but there were certainly some. God saves people of all types. And he allots to people various amounts of possessions. Although it is easy for the rich to be self-sufficient and proud and oppressive, riches in the scriptures are not inherently sinful. Money is not the root of evil, but the love of money is. To weather the trial of wealth, to count it all joy, the wealthy brother is told to glory in his humiliation. His humiliation is the loss of his worldly wealth.

The wealthy brother is not to boast in his riches. Rather he is to exult in the fact that he will be stripped one day of his worldly wealth. It is a glorious humiliation! Isn't that an odd thing to say? But it is true! One day the wealthy brother and sister will pass beyond the test to love these things which are passing away and beyond the temptation to be defined by them. What a glorious day! What is of true worth and true value will emerge clearly for all to see. It will be a day of humiliation for all who have invested themselves in these things and who have found their identity in these things. Keeping that day in mind will help the rich brother and the rich sister to weather well the trial of plenty, the trial of abundance.

III. The Key to Boasting Is Understanding.

James brings to our attention truths we need to understand. If we understand them and embrace them, then we can rejoice in the midst of the trials. We can count it all joy. We can exult in our exaltation. We can rejoice in our humiliation.

James emphasizes the temporary nature and ultimate irrelevance of worldly possessions. The rich brother like the flower of the grass will pass away. Just like everybody else, he will die, and suddenly after a brief life. This is the picture of a flower of the grass. The attractiveness of the world and its riches is alluring. It corresponds to the beauty of the flower of the grass.

We have some Gerber daisies in our breakfast room. We put them out on the patio during the late spring and summer and then bring them in during the fall and winter. When the days start getting longer, if we have watered them well, they will start to send up blooms. They are lovely! We have some that are bright yellow some that are soft pink. They are some of my favorite flowers. But if we have failed to water the plants, the beautiful blooms will quickly turn brown and slump. The beauty is completely gone in a brief time. That is the way it is with riches, and James wants us to understand. They are alluring for their promise of beauty and pleasure and prestige and satisfaction. Nice things, new things, things that make us feel special because we have them—they give us the sense of importance and relevance in the world. They are the devil's lie! Here today but gone tomorrow. What looks so enticing today will be repulsive in the day of humiliation. And all of the effort to accumulate and increase what decays and dies will show itself to have been a waste.

Is James saying it is bad to work hard and it is bad to make money and it is bad to save? Can't be. The Bible elsewhere commends all these things. What James and what the rest of scripture condemns is glorying in your wealth and riches as though it is the reason for your existence or the most important thing about you. Your life is not about the accumulation of goods and wealth. It is about seeking God's kingdom. And in God's kingdom what is true treasure is what you lay up in heaven not on earth. And as John says, "This world is passing away along with its desires, but the one who does the will of God abides forever."

The key to boasting in your exaltation in Christ and your humiliation in regard to earthly things is knowing and living in light of the reality of the fact that the world is passing away. The wealth and riches which the worldly so desperately pursues, is a trap to distract people from what really matters.

Conclusion

Trials remind us that there are ultimate realities which transcend our wealth. They bring rich and poor down to the same level. Doesn't matter how much money you have, cancer can attack and kill you. Tornadoes are no respecter of persons. Neither are fatal car crashes. Neither is heartache and disappointment. What makes all the difference is whether you are in Christ and whether the Lord God is your Father. There is an eternity beyond the brief transitory life we live. In that eternity the price of gas is not a subject of concern. There all eyes are on the thrones upon which sit God the Father and Christ Jesus the Son. All attention is engulfed with his glory and greatness and all those gathered around abound in joy because they love and prize him.