

The Best of Times; The Worst of Times: Part 2

sermonaudio.com

Epistle of James

By Ty Blackburn

Bible Text: James 1:10-11
Preached on: Sunday, June 11, 2017

Providence Church
2146 Buford Hwy
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

Website: www.providenceduluth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch

Please turn with me in your Bibles to James 1. It was a good week of Bible school this week. Thank you to all that worked so hard to make that a blessing for the children that came and a lot of hard work goes into that. It's amazing how quickly the church transformed Sunday after church last weekend to an Arctic wonderland and then we had snow coming down, I mean, it was cotton balls on little strings but at least that's what I think it was. But how quickly it was transformed into an Arctic wonderland and then how quickly it was taken down. You guys are just impressive to watch and it certainly was a wonderful blessing, I think, to so many children that came and got to hear God's word. Thank you for your prayers for that ministry as well and for those of you that brought your children.

We're again in James 1 this morning and we're continuing a message we started last Sunday morning, at least the title is the same title this morning, that is, "The Best of Times and The Worst of Times." The best of times and the worst of times from James 1. Our text is verses 10 and 11. Last week, verse 9, we gave the same title and this morning we will again be looking at that, use that, I'll remind you, I borrowed that from Dickens in his opening paragraph to his classic work, "A Tale of Two Cities." "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness." So he piles these contrasting terms one after another in that opening paragraph, basically showing that it can be both the best of times and the worst of times at the same time.

So this is exactly what James is talking about here in these verses. He's teaching us, he was writing to Jewish believers in the first century who were experiencing varied circumstances, many of whom would experience very difficult, humbling, lowly circumstances but there were, as always is the case, a diversity in the body of Christ. So he's basically telling us how to deal with the best of times and how to deal with the worst of times, and that the irony is that, as we're going to see as we read it again in a moment, that the brother in the lowest circumstances is apparently having the worst of times, is to glory in the fact that he is in a high place; that the worst of times actually has the potential of being the best. And then this morning we're going to see in verses 10 to 11, he says to those who are apparently in a very good place, in a high place, that in reality that has the potential of being the worst, and more than that, how you deal with that. How are we supposed to deal with the changing circumstances of life? How are we to honor

God when things are going terribly? And how are we called to honor God when things are going well? This is what James seeks to help us with: the best of times and the worst of times.

I want to read verses 1 to 11 and we're focusing in on verses 10 and 11 this morning.

1 James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings. 2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. 5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, 8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. 9 But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; 10 and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. 11 For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we ask that you might teach us from your word. We confess, Lord, that the one thing that lasts is the word of God. You told us in the prophet Isaiah, "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever." We pray that you might work eternally, work things of eternal value in our hearts this morning for the glory of Christ. We pray in his name. Amen.

So the best of times and the worst of times. James is helping us deal with, he's writing to believers as I mentioned earlier, these are Jewish believers in the first century. James as the half-brother of our Lord became an apostle because of a personal call of Jesus Christ. He was an unbeliever throughout Jesus' ministry. We see him casting aspersions with the other half-brothers of Jesus in John's Gospel, mocking Jesus, and yet the Lord Jesus Christ made a post-resurrection appearance to James and called him to be an apostle and he was regarded as an apostle in the New Testament and he led the church in Jerusalem. And after persecution broke out and the Jerusalem church was scattered abroad, James writes this letter out of concern for these Jewish Christians who are struggling, experiencing persecution, experiencing hardship. And we talked about the fact that he's very practical in his approach. He is concerned that we be doers of the word; that our faith be lived out in practice; that what we think and what we believe becomes what we do and what we are.

So he's dealing with very real practical issues and one of the issues he deals with here at the beginning is how do you deal with changing circumstances, and his focus at the first part of this letter is really all about trials, temptations, difficulties, how do you bear up under these things? So here in verses 9 to 11 he deals with the particular challenge that comes when we find ourselves in different circumstances, how do we live? When we're low, when life is hard, we find ourselves the brother of humble circumstances, the brother of lowly circumstances, whether it be material circumstances, poor, or it be the difficulties that come physically, relationally, that brother is to glory in his high position. We saw that last week.

This week, our focus is on the other person. Verse 10, "and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation." The first thing to see is there is one main verb in these three verses, there are other verbs but the main verb in this passage, verses 9 to 11, is there in verse 9, it is "glory." It is the imperative that dominates this passage and what he's doing is he's considering two different men, he's basically making an exhortation to all of the body of Christ. It's a comprehensive exhortation. You are either the brother of lowly circumstances at a point in time, or you are the brother of high circumstances, the rich man. At every point in your life you're one of these, and he's going to tell you how to live and follow Jesus Christ.

We might not see that immediately but it's really clear. The brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position, the rich man is to glory in his humiliation. He's talking to believers, to those who profess to know Christ. He's not talking about the rich that don't love the Lord, but the rich that profess to know Christ. And so he's dealing with the other side in verses 10 and 11. When things are going well in your life, what are we to do? How do we deal with that? And what we're going to see is James is very concerned about the danger that attends outward blessings. It's something that we saw earlier in what Jess read from Luke 12 where Jesus is reproofing that man that asked him, "Divide my inheritance. Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." And Jesus basically says, "Listen, life is not about what you have. You need to understand that. Life is not about what you have." And he tells that parable about the rich man who has many things and he works and he labors and he labors to store up for a wonderful retirement because his focus is on this world. And he gets everything together and he says to himself, and I love how Jesus says it, he says to his soul, "Soul, now you are ready to live." And he says, "You fool, do you not know that that very night your soul will be required of you?"

So he saved up all of that for someone else. This is essentially what James is going to talk about in this passage and, in fact, when we first introduced the book of James, we talked about some of the characteristics of James. He's rich in imagery and we see this. He draws on word pictures. And then he also is intense because we're going to see that what he says here in these verses he says with great intensity because he could have said it much shorter. In fact, let me just point that out right away. If you think about it, verses 9 and 10 are a perfect parallel, and if you were writing for just kind of neat concision, he could have ended at verse 10.

Look what I'm saying. Verse 9, "the brother of lowly circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation." Now, you could stop even there. Isn't that perfect parallel? "If you are in low position, glory in your high position; if you're in a high position, glory in your low position." But he adds a reason on the second half. The reason because you need to be really aware when things are going well, there is more danger, "because like flowering grass he will pass away." He picks out a wonderful image, like flowering grass he will pass away. That's a powerful image and we're going to unpack it a little bit later but I want you to note just right off the bat that he doesn't stop there. It's like he lays out the image and then he pours on more and more. He says, "I'm not sure you got it." Flowering grass fades away, yeah, we got it, James. "No." He says, "Look at the slow motion instant replay." It's like watching some of those nature shows where they do the time lapse photography and you watch a whole day happen in just a few seconds. He does something like that. "For the sun rises with a scorching wind. I said how the flowering grass will pass away, let me describe it to you in vivid detail. The sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away." He is emphatically underscoring, circling, highlighting, "Listen to this. Don't set your heart on riches. Don't set your heart on the things of this world. Don't set your heart on the blessings of this world. Set your heart on heaven. Set your heart on things that will never perish."

So that's the essential thing he's going to tell us to do, but let's look at it again now under the same outline we looked at last week. We had three points last week for the person in humble circumstances and we're going to have three points this week for the person in rich and abundant circumstances and the first point is: face your circumstances honestly. If you find yourself in times of blessing, face your circumstances honestly. Just accept the fact that this is the way it is. Don't pretend that it's not. And one of the things that we can sometimes do is we're just so busy always complaining we don't even realize how good we have it.

I mentioned last week that in one sense you could say that all of us are the rich man because we live in the richest culture in history. We have the highest standard of living that people have ever had. Our poor in America, I'm not saying that poverty is not an issue and there are some people who are really struggling because their families mistreat them, they don't take care of them, and there are some people that are hungry, but really in America you shouldn't have to be hungry in these days. It's amazing. I mean, people under the poverty line have cellphones and computers and televisions and cable television or internet television, whatever. And you think about that relative to the third world, that people in the world today, we are in the top of the whole world right now and you think about it over history, our standard of living is impossible for most people that have ever lived to imagine. I mean, we get hungry, all you have to do, I mean, nowadays even, you can call, what is it, you go on the internet and you can have a drone deliver a loaf of bread, I think pretty soon, right? "I'm hungry. I don't have any bread." Boom. Here Amazon comes sending... I haven't seen that. I don't really like that myself. I don't want drones flying around my neighborhood. It just seems weird. But that's going to be happening, apparently. It's unstoppable, I guess.

But think about that. In the old days, from most of history, if you wanted to eat some bread, well, you'd better grow the grain and then you'd better store it well. And then when you think about, "Hey, we're out of bread," it's not like you just, "Hey, I've got to run to the store. I'll be back in 15 minutes." No, I've got to go out and get some of the grain and I've got to grind it up for 30 minutes and then I've got to build a fire. I can't just turn on the oven. And if you burn the bread, you've got to start all over again. So we are incredibly wealthy and we don't realize it.

I heard a comedian one time talking about, I don't remember exactly how he said it, but he was basically talking about Disney World, taking your kids to Disney World, how they don't even appreciate the wonder and the blessing of that. They can be complaining at Disney World. And he was saying, "I want to invent a theme park called Third World, where take your kids and help them really be grateful for what they have every day. Hey, this is the ride where you don't eat all day. You don't eat all day."

Well, we don't realize how good we have it and so part of it is just acknowledging what we have honestly and openly and so we are materially wealthy. Now, then, he's also talking, though, and it still has application for us even in a wealthy society like ours that there's this relative sense of those that are more lowly among us materially than those who are high. So when we find ourselves struggling financially, this is for us. But it's not just financially or materially like we talked about last time, you could be wealthy not just materially, you could be wealthy physically. I mean, some have more physical blessings. Some are amazingly healthy people. You talk to somebody and they say, "I've never had a headache." What? You've never had a headache? That's a wonderful blessing. That's a wealth for people that have had migraines, isn't it? Or, "I just don't get sick. I got sick four years ago." Wow. Or they just have great strength and athletic ability. Some have it and some don't.

So we can have wealth and blessings and abundance in different ways. Some are mentally gifted and others are less gifted mentally, intelligence, the ability to think through things. There is some of that that's just God-given. And then some may have God-given ability but they didn't have the blessing to be able to study like someone else did because they couldn't go to the university or to study as long as the other person could. So you could look at that and say, "Well, I've not received what so many others have as far as intelligence or physical blessings and health. I'm unhealthy. I deal with things all the time." This message is for us in those moments.

I mentioned last time, too, you could be relationally wealthy, you could be relationally poor and impoverished, to be abandoned by those that should love us. But you could be emotionally wealthy. You could have everything going very well, a number of friends, and feel like your life is full, relationship with your wife or your husband is wonderful and so rich and in those moments, what are you to do? This is telling us how to live in those moments. The brother of the rich man, what does he do? When you're rich materially, physically, mentally, relationally, what are you to do? This passage is going to tell us.

First, face your circumstances honestly. That is, acknowledge it. Don't pretend that you're not having it good. Be thankful and give praise to God and with an appropriate heart enjoy those things from the Lord and use them for his glory. You don't have to apologize. It's God who has given to one and not another. We don't have to apologize for not having either. It's the Lord that has done these things. This is one of the things, one of the errors of socialism and communism is that the things that the socialist and the communist hates is that they don't like the fact that God determines. They want to make everybody equal because they think that's the way it should be, but God is the one who gives to one. Like I said last week when I quoted from God's word to Moses, "Who made the deaf, the dumb and the blind? Did not I, the Lord?"

So ultimately because we're fearfully and wonderfully made, we should accept whatever God gives to us and we should own it as it is and praise him for it. In the areas where we have abundance, praise him for that. In the areas where we have deficiency, praise him for that. So when it comes to this abundance, the brother, the rich man is to glory in his humiliation and it starts with facing your circumstances honestly. The second point, again, like we had last week, parallel to last week: interpret your circumstances biblically. So we said, first of all, face your circumstances honestly, and the second main point is interpret your circumstances biblically. Let the Scripture come in and show you where you truly are.

Not too long ago, I was driving somewhere I had never been before to a conference up in northwest Georgia and I was trying to bypass 285 and all of that so it took me through all kinds of roads I had never been on before. And I'm driving along and I'm thinking, I was running a little bit late for the meeting, not surprising, and I was running a little bit late for the meeting and so I'm trying to make sure I make all the right turns and all of a sudden I find myself, I look over at my GPS on my phone as I'm driving and it has me doing, you know when you have your blue line goes up and it turns around like this? It means you're going the wrong way. You're going up for a U-turn here soon. And I don't know how long I had been going. I hadn't looked at in like 10 minutes and I thought, "How long have I been going the wrong way?" But isn't it neat to have that, GPS, global positioning system that tells you where you truly are? You may think you're in a certain place but in reality you're somewhere different. I thought I was getting closer to the conference center but I was not and the GPS told me I wasn't.

We have a way of misperceiving where we really are and so this is what James is saying as he's basically saying the Bible is the way. It gives us a right perspective on where we really are and so we need God's word to show us. So the brother in lowly circumstances is actually in high circumstances and the brother in high circumstances, he says here, is to glory in his humiliation. He's to boast in his humiliation. The reality is you think he's high but he's really low.

I think at first he's getting at what I was talking about earlier, it's a position of danger. When things are going well, it's a very dangerous time. You see this in the way that God deals with his people in the Old Testament. When they're going to the Promised Land,

one of the things he tells them in Deuteronomy is, "When you go in and you take possession of the land and you inhabit cities which you did not build and you eat crops which you did not plant and you experience all the blessings of the land, be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God." There is a power about the things of this world that makes us forget God and so he's basically saying, "When you find yourself in abundance, watch out. It's a position of danger." Remember what Jesus said? It is harder for a rich man, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. It's that hard.

Now, the reality is the disciples rightly kind of understood this. They said to him, "Then who can be saved?" If it's that hard to be saved, who can be saved? There's something about wealth and abundance; when we have self-sufficiency that we forget and we don't understand our need of God.

So interpret your circumstances biblically means, first of all to be careful. I want to do two sub points under this interpret your circumstances biblically. I want us to think in terms of our position and our possessions. Our position and our possessions. Now, what he's saying is, "I want you to see your position biblically," and then, "I want you to see your possessions biblically." He basically says, first of all, glory in his humiliation, that is, glory in his position. He's really in a low position. And then he's going to go on and elaborate, as I mentioned earlier, that image says basically, here's the right way to see your possessions. They are all fading away. It's all going to wither.

So let's think, then, about first of all, interpreting your circumstances biblically, the second point, A, interpret your position biblically. Outwardly it looks like things are good. I mean, you're thankful that relationally things are well, that you're in a time of your life where your mind is strong, your body is healthy, you have enough things in this world to make life pleasant. He says realize your position and especially relatively speaking now. Back to even in America, some of us are going to be blessed at times more than others financially, right? And so when you find yourself blessed more than others, he's basically saying glory in your low position because there is a tendency when you find yourself blessed more than others relatively, to be proud, to think that you have more because you did more or you are better. It's just amazing how wicked pride is in our hearts. As Spurgeon said, it's the first thing, pride is the first sin that reveals itself in the nursery and it's the last sin that will be there before they put us in the box. Pride.

We want to see ourselves. You know, we find ourselves accomplishing things, maybe you're doing well and you see that you're accomplishing things and you want to see yourself as above others. Don't. 1 Corinthians 4:7, the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians, he says, "Why do you glory in what you have?" He says, "For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" You see, you're boasting in the fact that you have it. James is saying don't boast in the fact that you have it, boast in the fact that you have nothing; boast in the fact that you are nothing. What he really means is boast in the fact that whatever you have, you have because God gave it to you. That's what Paul is saying. Whatever you have, you have because you received it.

You know, think about you can say, "Well, I've worked hard." Well, yeah, you've worked hard but who gave you, who caused you to be born at the time that you were born into? God. Who caused you to be born into the family that you were born into? "Well, I had hard circumstances. It made me work hard." Well, who caused that so that you worked harder? Who gave you the strength every moment of every day of your life? Who kept you alive? Who has blessed you? Who has given you the intellectual ability to learn from what you've learned from? The stamina to work hard? Who has done that? It's all from God. From him and through him and to him are all things. So whatever you are, whatever you have, even the unbeliever is what he is by the common grace of God and nothing else. He doesn't know the saving grace of God but what he is, he is what he is by the common grace of God. God's gifts. God's amazing kindness.

So to see it, our position rightly, to interpret our position biblically is to see that, that whatever we are, we are by the gift of God. I love how this is pictured out in the life of one of the proudest men that ever lived, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. You see the wonderful account of this in Daniel 4 which is, in itself, an amazing part of Daniel. It's a letter written by the king, Nebuchadnezzar, the great conqueror of Babylon. He writes a letter to all of his people in which he recounts some things that happened and I think he's recounting his conversion. It's debated among scholars, was he really saved, we'll find out when we get to heaven. But the change that happened was pretty amazing.

Anyway, Nebuchadnezzar has a dream. He has built Babylon. He has conquered all these other lands. And he has a dream and Daniel interprets the dream and Daniel says, "Look, the dream is going to be bad news for you. You need to humble yourself. I don't want this to happen to you, Nebuchadnezzar. It looks like it's going to be really bad for you." And Nebuchadnezzar hears that and maybe it had impact for a day or two, but then a year later he is walking on his roof and he looks out at Babylon the Great...oh, the point of the dream was this: he heard these angels talking, angelic watchers, and they were basically...this tree is cut down and the tree is cut down and a stump grows so that you may know, that all the world may know that the Lord gives the kingdoms to whomever he wishes and bestows over them the lowliest of men. I love that. This is what Nebuchadnezzar heard: he bestows over the kingdoms not just average, the lowliest of men. God is trying to humble him. "Look, you're not so hot. In fact, comparatively you're on the bottom half." Jack has a thing that he says sometimes that, you know that 80% of people consider themselves above average. Think about the numbers there, huh? 80% above average.

Okay, Nebuchadnezzar thought he was the ultimate and God says, "No, you're really the lowliest." But he didn't heed that lesson and so it says 12 months later he's walking on his patio overlooking Babylon and he says, "Is this not the Babylon the Great which I have built by the strength of my might and for the glory of my majesty?" He says that. He hears a voice from heaven, "Today sovereignty is removed from you." And what happened was he became like a wild animal. The Lord pulled back his hand, kept him alive but pulled back his hand and his sanity left him. Nebuchadnezzar thinks he's like an animal and he's running around and, of course, now normally if something like this

happened in most times in history, people would be put away, but if you're the king and you believe that the king might be God, you don't mess with him so they let him go. They just avoided him. They kind of locked the doors and left him outside and for seven years he's outside living like an animal: eating grass; his hair gets matted so much that it said it was like eagles' feathers. Think about how nasty your hair is to look like that. He has not bathed in seven years. God has made a mockery of this man who thought he was so great.

Then Nebuchadnezzar recounts how he lifted his eyes toward heaven and he acknowledged that it was heaven that rules and suddenly a right mind came back to him and he was restored to his position and his fame and glory even increased. But he then ends up Daniel 4 saying that, "I know that there is a God in heaven who rules and he bestows the kingdom to whomever he wishes and I acknowledge that no one can resist his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?' He's doing his will among the host of heaven and on the earth."

So whatever you are, you are by the grace of God so don't boast in it. Be fearful of boasting in it. Your position is a gift of God. Your possessions, how do you regard your possessions? Interpret your abundance of possessions biblically. You're interpreting your circumstances biblically, first sub point of number 2 was your position; the second sub point, your possessions.

"For the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil," 1 Timothy 6:10. The danger of money. It's not money itself, it's the love of money. But money being there and possessions being there, the heart is easily drawn to the love of money. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters," and he was talking about God and money. You can't serve both God and mammon, money. It has tremendous power to produce our trust. We rely upon it rather than God.

So when you have an abundance of things, there is this ever-present danger that you will trust in what you have rather than trusting in God, but you will want what you have rather than wanting your inheritance in heaven. John Wesley, the story is told when he was ministering in America, he was taken one time on one of his preaching tours to the home of a very wealthy man and he saw the vast estate of this wealthy man and he sat at the table and ate and as he was commenting to one of his associates after the dinner, he said, "These are the things that make it hard for a man to die." These are the things that make it hard for a man to die. Our love of the world can choke out love of God, the pleasures of this world. You can't love this world and love God.

So when you have possessions, when you have blessings, he's saying be careful. And he makes it so emphatically clear, as I said earlier. Look at how James wants to make sure we don't miss this part of the message. He didn't add a whole bunch of explanation to the first half where the brother of lowly circumstances is to glory in his high position. That's all he said. But this one, the brother rich man, the brother who is rich is to glory in his humiliation and then he says, "because." The reason that you must not allow your heart to be set on the things of this world but you must set your heart on the things above, the reason that you must glory in your humiliation is because it's deadly not to.

"Like flowering grass he will pass away." Whatever you have, the things that you have will pass away and he uses that image like flowering grass, which we talked about briefly earlier. Think about the beauty of a field of grass. You know, you're driving along somewhere or you're walking along and you see the wildflowers come up and a lot of times they come up, you know, if you let your grass, you don't cut it for a while, sometimes you find you have wildflowers which is a really good reason to let it grow, isn't it? I mean, it's beautifying the neighborhood. People don't seem to appreciate that like they should. But there are some things that are like that truly. I mean, you see that. Like along the interstate you'll see wildflowers grow and they planted them but it's the grass growing in the flowers, or among the grass.

Well, it's there and then how quickly it's gone. In fact, the word for "pass away" pictures coming alongside. You're walking upon it and you see it and then you walk past it. That's the image he uses here in verse 10, that the glory and the things that we have are like that wildflower, that flower of the grass that you walk beside and you see it and then suddenly it's no more. You notice the flower and then you come by the next day and it's gone. That's what the things of this world are like. Gone like that.

That's a powerful word picture and as I said, though, that's not enough for James. He knows it's not enough for us so he slows down and he elaborates in verse 11, and he does this, there are four verbs in verse 11, or actually there are five but the four in a row: rises, withers, falls off, is destroyed. Rises, withers, falls off, is destroyed. The sun rises with a scorching wind. The grass withers. The flower falls off. The appearance, the beauty is destroyed. All four of those verbs are in the aorist tense. I've mentioned before the aorist tense in Greek speaks of the kind of action, and particularly has the idea of punctiliar action. This is the basic meaning of the aorist tense. I mentioned the present tense speaks of continuous action. The verb for "boast," the rich man is to boast or the humble man is to boast, to glory, that's a present tense verb. Ongoing, you're to keep at it. But these verbs here when he says the sun rises, the grass withers, the flower falls off, the appearance is destroyed, he's speaking at a point in time, point in time, point in time. It's like he's emphasizing with the aorist tense, changing the tense, how quickly it's gone. It's like a dot so that the picture is the sun rises. Immediately the grass withers. Immediately the flower falls off. And immediately its beauty is destroyed. That's what it's like when you trust in riches. How quickly they're gone.

You know, the older I get, the more I realize even just we talked earlier about, you know, your physical, your mental blessings, don't we see as we get older, you can see how fleeting those things are, can't you? When you're young, some of you in your 20s or teens, you feel like you're going to be that way forever. You know you're not but you feel, you actually feel like you are. You feel invincible but you're not and how quickly it all fades. You've seen a picture of like you've gone to your grandparents' house and you look at a picture when they got married and as a grandchild you didn't know them until they were well up in age and, of course, when you're a little child you think everybody that's over 40 is just ancient. And you look at them and you say, "Wow!" How quickly it

passes by. That's what James is saying. The suddenness. He's using the verb tense to emphasize the suddenness with which everything is gone. Don't put your trust in it.

So interpret your circumstances, your position. You are what you are by the grace of God. Your possessions, whatever you have, you have from God, but realize that whatever you have, it's going to be gone like that so don't set your heart on it. Enjoy the things that God gives, yes. He doesn't say despise everything, the blessings. No, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." God is the one who has made food to taste wonderful. He's the one who's made us to be strong and to have the abilities that we have and so we give him glory for that and we thank him for it and we enjoy it and we can lament the fact that we do get old and that we see things like disease take things away. But ultimately we aren't putting our hope in this world or the things of this world. That's the Christian response that James is calling us to.

So we said the first two points: face your circumstances honestly, interpret your circumstances biblically. Thirdly, respond. Third point: respond to your circumstances logically. Let me come back to the main verb of this passage, boast. Glory is how it's translated in the translation I'm reading. But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position. The word could be translated "boast; vaunt; rejoice; take pride in; exult." The last time I mentioned I really like the word "exult" which is used to translate that same verb a couple of times in Romans, several times actually in Romans 5. Exult, that is "to delight in; to actively rejoice in." And it's a present...I mentioned this verb is a present tense verb, that the word for "glory" is to glory in his high position is to glory in his humiliation. That verb is to be applied by both parties: the brother in low circumstances and the brother in high circumstances. The brother in high circumstances is to glory in his humiliation. But he's to glory. That is present tense, ongoing action. He's to continually set his mind on rejoicing not in what he has but in his humiliation, in his being made low.

It's basically the same word as the word for, the same root word as the word for the brother of humble circumstances. You can kind of see it in the NASB. Humiliation, related to humility, humble. The rich man is to glory in his lowliness. He's to glory in the fact that he's made low.

What does that look like? Think about then with position and possessions. The way that you don't let high position and lots of possessions wreck your spiritual well-being is you boast or glory in your lowness which we're going to say, to respond to your circumstances logically. That's the third point, is to do what you ought to do if you could see things as they really are. I love the fact that the Bible is eminently logical. I mean, it's spiritually discerned. Yes, the Lord has to open your heart to see it but when you see it, you see that it is completely right and true. It's the only thing that makes sense.

So respond to your circumstances logically means in your true position, boast. Boast not in your apparent position but in your true position. Your apparent position is you're high, things are well, but what is your true position? You seem to be relatively high compared to other people: maybe you're wealthy, maybe relationally you're wealthy, or your health

is good and you want to boast in that relative to other people; you want to delight in that because of the joy that that brings. He says, "No, don't delight in that. Delight in your true position. You're not above anyone else."

What is your true position if you belong to Jesus Christ? Your true position cannot be a high position. It is a low position. You're a slave. He's saying boast in the fact that you have nothing. Boast in the fact that everything that you are really is a gift of God; that you are nothing in yourself; that to follow Jesus, to be a follower of Jesus is to have nothing, truly; that everything that you have, you hold it with an open hand. It belongs to God.

You think about what Jesus did when he came to this world and he says, "Follow me." When he came to this world, he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped but he took upon himself the form of a slave. That's how it could be translated in Philippians 2. He took upon himself the form of a slave and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death. He lowered himself. He took upon himself the form of a slave, became in the appearance of man, human flesh, and then he lived a life of lowliness and humility and humiliation and service, and he says to you and to me, "If you want to be my disciples, come follow me." In Luke 9:23, he says, "If any man would be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." So that the Christian is a person who denies himself, disowns himself. He says, "It's not me. It's nothing about me that commends me to God. In fact, everything that's true of me, I disown. I reject. I want all of Jesus. I want nothing of me."

That's what the Christian does and so he's saying, "When you find yourself blessed, don't glory in that. Glory in the fact that to come to Christ you really disowned yourself and became a slave." Isn't it interesting that James begins this letter, I mentioned earlier I really believe with confidence that James is the half-brother of Jesus, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, but look how he introduces himself to us, "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." "Do you want to know who I am?" James says. "I am a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." He doesn't bother calling him his half-brother. "He's my Master and I'm his slave." So spend time meditating on the fact that I'm lowly, I'm nothing. When I think I'm something, I'm nothing.

So respond to your circumstances logically. Boast in your true position. Boast in the fact that we are nothing; that we must decrease, as John the Baptist said, he must increase; that whatever we are, we are by the grace of God. Then not only boast in your true position, boast in your true possessions. Everything that we have in this life that we might want to boast in, you know, I really have a lot of respect for folks that do really good gardening and we're trying to do better at that. You can pray for my wife and her patience with me but I'm not very good at it. But anyway, you know, people really do a great job in their yard and it looks wonderful and you're like, "Man." There's one yard we drive by in our neighborhood where we constantly look over and see, "What have they done now?" And it's so impressive but it's not going to last.

It's not going to last and what we should be boasting in, though we can do those things and it's okay to spend time with that and it's fine, but put it in its proper place. What we really need to boast in is what's going to last forever and that's our treasures in heaven. That's who we are in Christ. And boast in the fact that even if we have a beautiful yard, I'm not boasting in that. I'm boasting in the fact that I have nothing except what I have in heaven. And if anything, you look at that beautiful yard and you think, "Man, if it can get this pretty in this fallen world, what's heaven going to be like?" How wonderful is it going to be to be in his presence? Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt and thieves do not break in and steal. Peter encourages us in 1 Peter 1 that we have been born again to an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, that will not fade away.

So we need to glory in the fact that everything that we have here is really ultimately nothing. It's going to burn up. That all of our affection, we're trying to set on heaven. We're actively boasting in the fact that the things here are nothing and Jesus and heaven are everything. This is what the Christian is to do. The same way that we have to become lowly in position and possessions to come to Christ. I mean, basically when you come to Jesus, you have to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him. You have to lose your life, he says, to find him.

So are we willing to surrender everything to him? He told that rich young ruler, "Go and sell all that you have and give it to the poor." That doesn't mean he's going to tell you to do that but if he did tell you to do that, would you do it? If not, beware and labor by God's grace to be the person who says, "Lord, whether it's wealth that I have, relationally my family is in such wonderful circumstances, if it's wealth that I have financially, if it's wealth that I have in my own physical body in health, whatever it is, if you take it away, I will still praise you. I will still worship you because I'm not setting my heart on that, I'm setting my heart on the day that I will be with you."

This is what James is saying. The rich man is to glory in his humiliation because like flowering grass he will pass away. In the midst of his pursuits he will fade away. The best of times and the worst of times. The best of times can be the worst of times when we let the best of times capture our affections, but when we put our affections on Jesus and boast in all that we are in him, then we are able to be delighted in Christ, anticipate heaven and still enjoy the blessings of this world.

Let's go the Lord in prayer.

Father, we thank you for an eternal hope and an eternal inheritance that's reserved in heaven for us, imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, kept in heaven for us who are also kept by the power of God until that day. Father, we pray that you would search us and show us where the things of this world have begun to gain a foothold and help us to surrender to you. Lord, search us and know us. Try us to know our thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in us and lead us in the way everlasting. Help us to be people who see what really matters and what really lasts is all that Christ is and all that he's prepared for us and make us a people who are truly so heavenly minded that we are able to give

you glory and do so much earthly good. We thank you for our Savior who was willing, though he was rich yet for our sakes he became poor that through his poverty we might become rich. Make us like him. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.