

The Poverty of Riches and the Riches of Poverty



Hebrew Date: 3rd of Iyar, 5781

4/15/2021

James 1:9-10

**Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted:
But the rich, in that he is made low:
because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away.**

**For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat,
but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth,
and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth:
so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.**

When you read the first chapter of James it seems like these three verses are out of place. He begins the chapter expressing how trials build Christian Character and why that realization ought to give us comfort, even a spiritual joy or enlightenment to give us strength as we endure whatever difficulty we are going through.

Then we come to these three verses about the rich and poor and then in verse 12 right back to the theme of enduring trials.

The Christians in Jerusalem were under intense persecution. Most of the followers of Christ were low income and there were so many widows the church took under it's wing that the first Deacon board was chosen to take care of feeding and housing widows and orphans. Stephen, one of the first Deacons of the early church was stoned by a mob for preaching Christ and the Sanhedrin sent out spies and deputized officers like Saul of Tarsus to find Christians and try them. Saul was there and part of the mob when Stephen was murdered by the mob.



The persecution was so intense Christians had to meet in secret and were scattered having to leave homes and towns and find anonymity in other places.

Acts 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

So rather than these three verses in James being out of place they give us a window into what kind of tribulation and trial James is talking about.

Shunning by family, synagogue, business associates and townspeople. Fear of being suddenly and violently scourged and stoned to death or one of your loved ones being taken away by the authorities.

This letter written by James was hand carried to be read and copied by Christians meeting in secret. It was a fearful time. To get some word from James the brother of our Lord would give them hope.

James is explaining how the spiritual principle of joy in trials works itself out. The apostle Paul also assured the persecuted Christians in Rome that God was fulfilling his good purposes.



ROMANS 8:28, 31

AND WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS
WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THEM
THAT LOVE GOD, TO THEM WHO ARE
THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS
PURPOSE. WHAT SHALL WE THEN SAY
TO THESE THINGS? IF GOD BE FOR US,
WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?

As Christians fled Jerusalem believers of the poorer strata of society found themselves exalted as the wealthier among them gave them assistance. The upper and lower classes generally did not mingle together and yet now out of necessity they find themselves thrown together - rejected by their own families they now become the family of God.

Rubbing shoulders with the rich or powerful exalts the lower class but it is humiliating for the upper class to find themselves suddenly below their caste. These lower class people talk different, they smell different, they act different, they have different interests.... NASCAR and barbecue rather than opera and caviar...

If you were in the place where these Christians were at that time these verse would either make you laugh or cry because they are so true. It was a new social strata, the rich and poor brought together by faith in Christ.

I can just see Gomer walking up to put his big sweaty arm around the shoulder of Trevor the rich guy who was born with a silver



spoon in his mouth and say hey brother, how ya doin? Gomer is exalted but Trevor... not so much. Trevor looking around to make sure no one he knows is watching ... finding the whole thing humiliating.

James reminds the wealthier man that such humbling is for his benefit as much as the exalting is for his lower class brother in Christ. James reminds the upper class brethren that their high fashion ways are going to fade away like the grass and flowers of the field in the dry heat of summer.

For the poor man to be driven out of Jerusalem even if he loses all that he has he did not lose much in comparison to the rich man, driven from his mansion and position maybe even all of his wealth for the sake of Christ now finds himself having to live without all of the luxuries he once enjoyed. He might even be brought so low as to have to accept charity from a beggar.

James 1:12 KJV

BLESSED IS THE MAN THAT ENDURETH TEMPTATION: FOR WHEN HE IS TRIED, HE SHALL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE, WHICH THE LORD HATH PROMISED TO THEM THAT LOVE HIM.

So what are the temptations of these persecuted and dispersed believers? The number one temptation is to leave the faith of Christ and just return to their old lives.

The poor man might take undue advantage of whatever wealth the rich man still possesses or who knows... this new believer might have been a professional pick pocket or scam artist. Maybe he might be tempted to go to the authorities and turn this professional man in to collect the bounty and certainly the rich man will want to selfishly guard his possessions knowing that the poor man will only see money as a source for food and lodging and not as investment to build upon and get a fresh start.

Imagine the arguments and strife, paranoia distrust and fear. Who can you trust? Some might be using an alias for protection. They did not have the new testament to guide them or centuries of Christian writings to provide guidance.

THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER



Early American Author Mark Twain wrote a book entitled, "The Prince and the Pauper"

It is about a boy named Tom Canty the son of an abusive drunkard in the slums of London. The boy longed for a better life and showed potential so the parish priest taught him to read and gave him an education that few youngsters of his social class could have.

He would hang around the palace gate and dream of what life would be like in such a place, the food, the clothing the hunts the events. One day while hanging around the palace gate, Edward Tudor, the prince of Wales see's him and is intrigued as he gazes on Tom for it is like looking in a mirror. The two boys meet and get acquainted and find that not only do they look identical but they were born on the very same day.

The prince is bored of his protected lifestyle and wants to see what it is like in the real world so the two boys change places. The prince takes the great seal of England and hides it first and then slips out of the palace to find the home of Tom Canty.



The prince cannot take the abuse of the father and runs off but now learns what life is like for a pauper in England. How the poor do not get a fair trial and are flogged and burned at the stake, branded or hanged for petty offenses, the prince learns first hand the life of his look alike Tom, even finding himself in prison for a stint. Hearing that the King had died the prince tried to return to the castle but no one would believe it was he dressed in paupers clothes and filthy until he procured the great seal of England. In the end he was crowned the king and ruled mercifully and gave his Friend Tom an earl ship.

But I think Mark Twain stole the plot of that story from the pages of Scripture. For the Bible tells us that.

Philippians 2:5

**Let this mind be in you,
which was also in Christ
Jesus:**

But made himself of no reputation,
and took upon him the form of a
servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

JESUS
EMPTIED HIMSELF
TAKING THE FORM OF A
SERVANT



6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

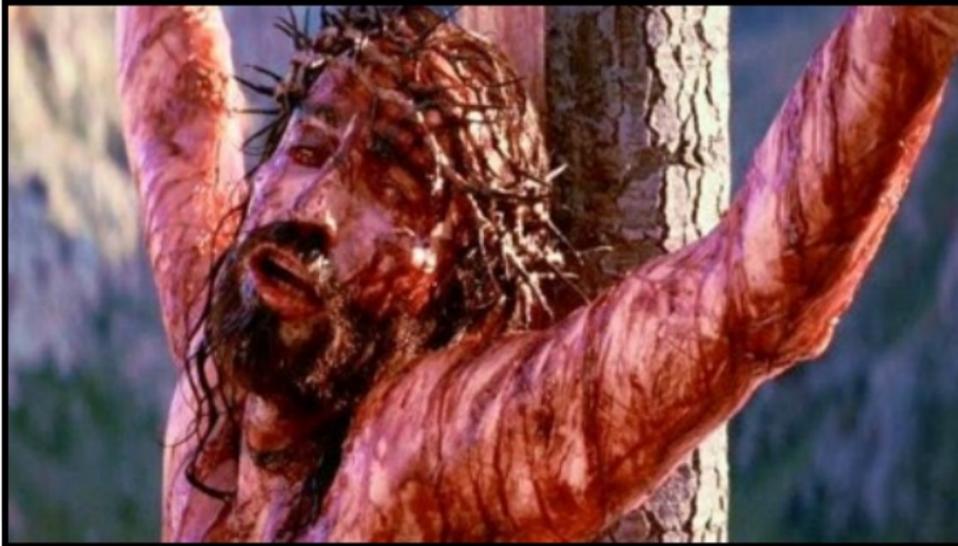
9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth;

11 And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

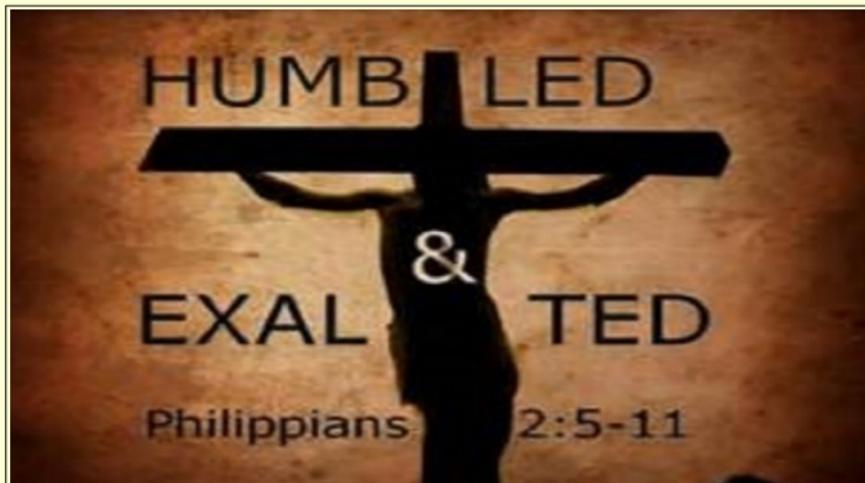
Christ the King of Heaven willingly took on the identity of a pauper. Left his grandeur and reputation to become one of us. James knew something about a rich man taking on a humble role. He did not understand it as he was growing up but from reading his writing one thing that deeply impressed him about his brother Jesus is the realization that he wasn't just acting

Christ Endured Temptation for Us



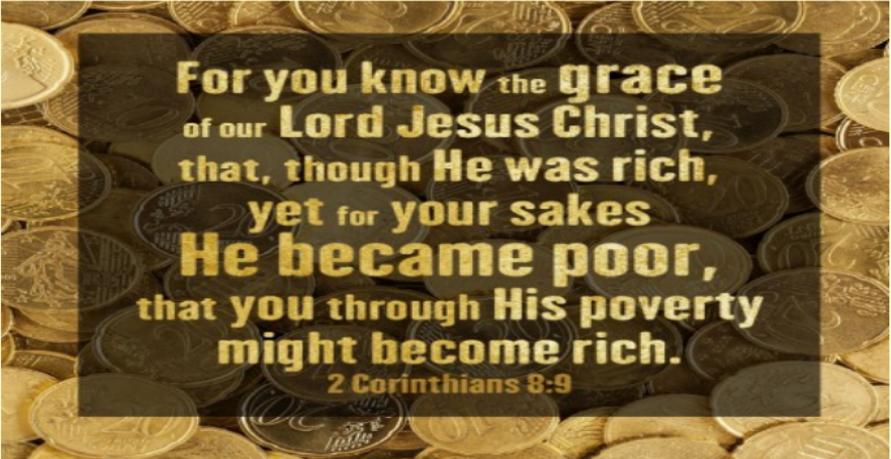
like he was nobility. He really was the king. No wonder James is so put off by the elitist attitudes of the rich. He had seen true humility by the one that had every right to be served by all.

Jesus did far more than the prince in the novel by Twain. Jesus went all the way to the cross and suffered for us, for we are Tom Canty.... We are the paupers.



Then Christ was exalted.

I can decipher the mind of James I think... He is speaking of his brother Jesus when he said let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. That brother, that example was Jesus. But Christ also was rich and was made low... Christ with the riches of glory made low to even suffer death so every rich man in Christ must give up his ways as Christ did.



**For you know the grace
of our Lord Jesus Christ,
that, though He was rich,
yet for your sakes
He became poor,
that you through His poverty
might become rich.**
2 Corinthians 8:9

They say that death is the great equalizer. Both the rich and powerful and the poor and forgotten one day become equal. You can't take it with you....

Except for Jesus. When he died he rose again victorious and gained all things.

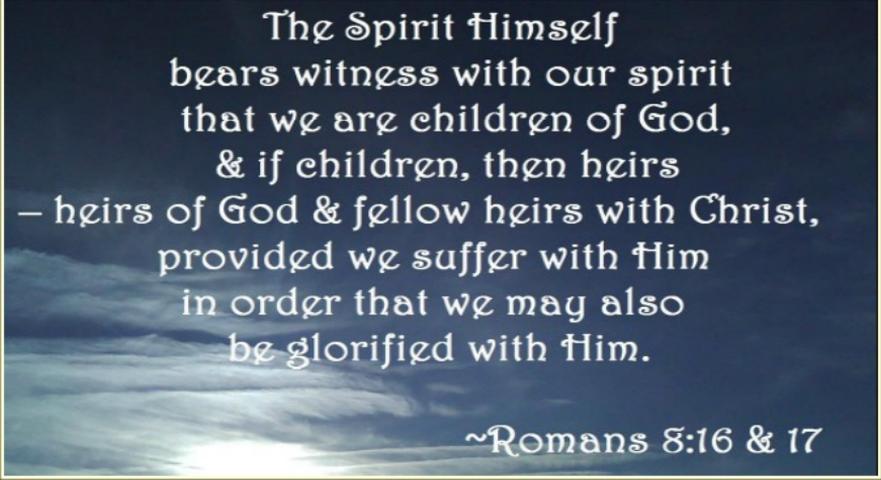
James 1:12

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

Jesus endured that painful night in the garden of Gethsemane as he was tempted and prayed so earnestly that he sweat great drops of blood and Christ Jesus gained his Kingly crown.

I think as James penned those words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he too had to endure the trial and one day his half-brother Jesus would give him the crown of life. What a blessed reunion that must have been.

The Scriptures clearly warn us that we will have to endure suffering and trials but what we suffer in this life is nothing in comparison to the reward of Glory in the presence of our Lord.



The Spirit Himself
bears witness with our spirit
that we are children of God,
& if children, then heirs
– heirs of God & fellow heirs with Christ,
provided we suffer with Him
in order that we may also
be glorified with Him.

~Romans 8:16 & 17

Those three seemingly misplaced verses in James have much to say. They are a window into what the trials were that James referred to. They are there for that very reason. When it comes to suffering through temptation and trials, Jesus is our example of the rich being humble and the poor lifted up. Of enduring temptation and receiving the crown of life