

09.26.10 / James 1:9-11

Passage Insight

Let's get some context. James has addressed this letter to the Jews who are now following Jesus but who have been scattered. He explains to them that trials in the hands of God can actually be a source of joy as they afford us opportunities to be strengthened and become steadfast as our Lord is steadfast. He reminds his readers that the Lord is exceedingly generous to lavish us with the gift of His wisdom when we earnestly and faithfully seek it. So we begin to see that for Christians, trials have a whole new meaning. They can be instruments that the Lord uses to make us more into His own image.

Interestingly, we see in today's passage that James moves from discussing trials and wisdom to money. Though the reasons for this may vary, the message is clear: In your trials, seek the Lord and His wisdom, not the false and crumbling security of financial resources. The reason for this is that our circumstances, financial or otherwise, simply don't define us, nor do they exalt us before the Lord. We don't preach or practice a prosperity gospel or a poverty gospel here because financial status is circumstantial, nothing more. What defines us is instead the object of affection of our hearts. When our affection is for Christ (and not ourselves, money, or anything else), we are defined by HIM, as we have been crucified with him and now live only because HE lives.

For those who serve money, all that they are able to boast in is their own destruction, because slavery to money is slavery to an inanimate object that is incapable of good or bad. This is idolatry, and the Lord is opposed to idolatry. It's the same as bowing to a stone statue. Lifeless, unable to do a single thing, created by something else, money stands hopeless to offer anything that we crave, and when we serve money, our affection is not for the Lord. But, the good news is this: for those who serve the Lord by humbly trusting Jesus Christ rather than financial circumstances, quite literally exaltation awaits. Why? Because Christ Himself has been exalted, and if Christ is the only reason we live (we have died to ourselves), then we are exalted because HE is exalted. All the exaltation, glory, and righteousness our hearts long for have been given to Jesus, and because He lives in us, we can safely boast solely in Him, as we see in Galatians 6:14, where it says, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

It's clear from Matthew 6:24 that when it comes to affection and service, we can only have true affection for one master: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." When we attempt to serve both God and money, we find ourselves in the category of being double-minded, as we read about in verse 8, and a double-minded person is cut off from the wisdom of God. There is no steadfastness being developed when our hope is in our financial circumstances. What a hard thing to believe in our culture, but it's true. James is teaching his readers that their hope must only be in the Lord if they are to expect to receive His wisdom, leading to His strength, leading to His steadfastness.

Ultimately, the riches of this world will pass away, but for those of us who follow and trust Jesus Christ, we have an inheritance that is unfading, kept in heaven for us, unreachable by the destruction, death, decay, and humiliation of the world. 1 Peter 1:3-5 says this:

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 Christ 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.

Let this truth put money in its proper place in our lives, and let this truth refocus our affection solely on the Lord through the powerful – and complete – work of Jesus Christ alone.

Application Questions

True Power

- 1) Where do you currently trust finances to save you?
- 2) When you do this, you're trying to give money some sort of power it doesn't have. What power are you attributing to money that it doesn't actually have?
- 3) How have you in the past justified going to what is powerless instead of to what is all powerful?
- 4) True power exists in Jesus alone. What truths of Jesus found in Scripture (get some help from the group) will turn the tables and move you to trust all powerful Jesus instead of finances?

Jesus Is Enough

- 1) When our hope is in our finances, our hope is not in Jesus. Where do you think that Jesus is not enough, leading you to put your hope in money instead?
- 2) What does Scripture say about Christ's capacity?
- 3) When we put our hope in something other than Jesus, we are double-minded and cut off from God's wisdom, unable to develop steadfastness. How have you seen this in your own life?
- 4) What does it look like for you to repent?

Sources

- Prayer