

James the Just: Sneaky Trials

Last week we covered trials. We all will face trials in this life. But it is our response to trials that is important.

James talks about how we are to respond to these trials. We are to count it all joy, knowing that God is working in our lives. We should look for the good in the trial, how can we profit or take advantage or gain from the trial.

And then James follows that up with the response to those who don't know how to do that.

Pray.

Ask God for wisdom and He WILL give it to you. But don't just ask....ask in faith, not doubting whether or not God's wisdom is best. You must decide that you are going His way because it is best.

If you can't even make up your mind on whether or not you really want His wisdom, don't waste your time asking because at that point you are double minded and should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

That sounds hard but it's what James said. Anything we ask we have to ask in faith. Faith in Jesus. That is trusting in Him and having confidence in Him. If you trust Him, then ask away!

So again, we will all face trials, that is a certainty. Now many trials are no-brainers. Most of them you recognize and so could anyone else around you. And most of those trials pass and once they are gone they may never return.

An illness, a troubled relationship, car troubles, water leaks, internet outage, a guitar string breaks.....many trials are short, some are minutes, some hours, and some are days, some years, some many years.

The point is that many of them are very recognizable and once you can identify them, you can look for the benefit of them and get through them.

Then there are other kinds of trials, the ones that I call the sneaky trials. These are the trials that you are in and don't even know it. Trials that by the time you recognize them as trials, you feel hopeless and in too deep.

James touches on a couple of these sneaky trials here in chapter 1.....poverty and prosperity. Yes, you will see that even prosperity can be a trial!

A survey of Christians revealed that:

- 50% of Christians consider money to be the primary indicator of success
- 19% of Christians believe you can tell how successful a person is by examining what they own.

Jesus knows this is a prominent issue (and always has been)

- 16 of the 38 parables addressed money or possessions
- 1 out of 10 verses in the four gospels deal with money
- The bible has 500 verses on prayer, just under 500 on faith, but more than 2000 on money and possessions

The bible talks extensively about money and possessions for a reason, because both a lack of and an abundance can cause us great trials in life!

PRAY

James 1:9-11

9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

First let's look at the poor. v9 says "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation".

A lowly brother would be one that was looked at as being less than others. Lowly means as a condition of low degree. This is exactly how the poor were looked at, as less than others.

Just as money is an indicator of success or importance in our current society, it was then as well. And just as it is wrong now, it was wrong then. James is challenging us to look at people and possessions through the eyes of Christ.

We can all see where poverty can be trying. Poverty can certainly test your faith.

When faced with poverty, like any other trial, what matters is how you respond to it.

- Do you accept it as the norm, for you as though there is no other way?
- Do you just attempt to earn enough money to work your way out of it?
- Do you blame others (government, society, God) claiming injustice?
- Do you trust in Jesus to provide for your basic needs on a daily basis?

Living in poverty is a real trial. You constantly have to battle unhappiness and envy. But James says to glory in your exaltation.

Seems reasonable, huh? Probably does to those who are NOT in poverty....

It is reasonable though if you focus your sights on the right target. You may not have a high earthly position, the world may not view you as important or successful. But it's not about the world's opinion....

Psalm 9:18 (NIV)

18 But God will never forget the needy;
the hope of the afflicted will never perish.

Jesus reminds us of the value of life

Luke 12:15

15 And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Luke 6:20

20 Then He lifted up His eyes toward His disciples, and said:
"Blessed are you poor,
For yours is the kingdom of God.

French writer Victor Hugo said He who is not capable of enduring poverty is not capable of being free.

Poverty and prosperity both can cause enormous pressure on a person to focus on the world instead of focusing on Jesus.

The reason poverty is a sneaky trial is because you can so easily focus on what you don't have that you lose sight of what you do have. That is James' point here.

1 Timothy 6:6-9 (NIV)

6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

People spend a lifetime trying to acquire stuff that will make them happy, or prove them successful. And many of those people miss the entire point.

2 Corinthians 8:9

9 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.

Jesus is God! Jesus was rich! He was Lord of heaven and earth. He owned everything, possessed all power, authority, glory, honor, majesty. But He gave it all up.

Jesus became poor taking on the role of a bondservant in human form, He left His place in heaven. Though innocent, He died on a cross like a criminal....so that through this you may become rich!

1 Peter 1:3-4

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

This inheritance includes a current state and future state for born again believers...

Current state

- they are seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, far above all rulers, and authorities and powers and dominions. (Ephesians 2:6, 1:21.)
- they are partakers of the exceeding riches of His grace (Ephesians 2:7).
- they have a "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:4).

Future state

- Now only will they be resurrected, but they will receive a glorified body. (1 Corinthians 15)
- As they have shared in His sufferings, so shall they share in His glory (Romans 8:17, 18 and 1 Peter 4:12-13).
- they will live forever with Christ in His Father's house—"I will come again and receive you unto Myself, so that where I am there you may be also" (John 14:1-4).

That is why you glory in your exaltation....because Jesus lifts you up. He doesn't see you as the world sees you. To Him your wealth and status on earth do not define who you are and they do not define your worth.

Are you rich spiritually? That is the question. Because if you are, you can handle the trial or poverty in this life. You can look at that trial and find how you can profit from it....here is the profit, more spiritual riches!

Now for the rich....

James 1:9-10a

9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation

Let the rich glory in his humiliation. I am not one who believes that God wants all Christians to be poor and have nothing. What I do believe is that we have a great responsibility as Christians in handling how we view others and ourselves whether rich or poor. Or in between

1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NIV)

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

See, the rich are tried in their riches. Do you become boastful, proud, arrogant?

Have you ever been shopping in St. Louis near the Galleria? It's a ritzy area where it seems like everyone is driving a car that's worth more than everything I own. You can see it in these people, the way they drive, the way they treat people....they are really something...they are rich!

Some of these people have a fish on their car....acknowledging that they are Christians. They are being tried in their riches....and failing the trial!

Notice that James doesn't say to the rich, give everything away, you can't have it, although he does say be generous and share it....But he says glory in your humiliation, why?

It's humbling to think that no matter how rich you are, it is temporary and brings you no advantage before God. Just as easily as it was obtained, it can be taken away.

Deuteronomy 8:18 (NIV)

18 But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your ancestors, as it is today.

God gives you the ability to produce wealth! Without Him you don't even have the ability. There's some humble pie for the rich! That'll show em!

Not only does He give you the ability but....it's all God's anyway! You don't believe me?

Psalms 24:1-2 (NIV)

1 The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
2 for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.

Another humbling thing about riches is that with riches comes great responsibility. How many of you have declined an increase of something because you didn't want the extra responsibility?

Many times people who have been in management in the past, don't want to return to it because of the responsibility. And of course most people that have never been in management want to be in it, until they find out how much more responsibility they will have.

It's not like that with finances and possessions. Everyone wants more of those things! It's a sneaky trap. With riches comes greater responsibility. No matter how much you have there is responsibility attached but with more it becomes greater....

We are to be good stewards of God's wealth, that is a big responsibility.....doing what HE would want you to do with those riches.

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells the parable of the talents. Three servants were given talents to invest while the master was gone. One was given 5, another was given 2, the other was given 1.

When the master returned, you see that the one with 5 had invested them and gained 5 more. He was told - "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

The one with 2 had also invested his and gained 2 more and was told the same thing - "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

Notice that one had 5, the other had 2 but they were both praised by the master for being good and faithful!

It's not about how much you have, it's about what you do with it. Do you do what pleases the master? If not you might be like the 3rd guy...

He buried his 1 talent in the back yard and did nothing with it and he was told - "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. 27 So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received back my own with interest. 28 Therefore take the talent from him, and give it to him who has ten talents."

Then Jesus concludes the parable with this

Matthew 25:29

29 'For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

Every person who has been a **biblical and faithful steward** will be entrusted with more, because of their faithfulness to God.

Those who are unfaithful in their stewardship of God's money will lose even what they have.

There's more humble pie rich man! That is why riches are trying. It can be really hard to do what God wants done with His riches.

It's a continuous trial to put self down, not think of what else you can buy and have but instead how He would want to you use it.

We must also remember the limits of riches. They are NOT eternal.

Psalm 49:6-7

6 Those who trust in their wealth
And boast in the multitude of their riches,
7 None of them can by any means redeem his brother,
Nor give to God a ransom for him—

This is why the best thing we can do with our finances is invest in the Kingdom of God. Everything else we do with our finances will perish, but when we use them to advance His Kingdom, we are investing in lives being changed for eternity!

Psalm 62:10b

If riches increase,
Do not set your heart on them.

Do not set your heart on them.....because they are deceitful....it's a trial

Mark 4:19

19 and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

Riches are so often associated with success and happiness, than they deceive people into thinking they don't need God. Or at the very least that they don't need Him right now, maybe later when something goes wrong that money can't fix....

Another thing I noticed at the Galleria, they have a quote on the wall near the fountain, it says "Whoever said that money doesn't buy happiness didn't know where to shop"

That's the deceitfulness of riches....

James 1:9-11

9 Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, 10 but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. 11 For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits.

This is a picture of how death and judgement can quickly end the wealthy person's dependence on material possessions.

Accumulated wealth, in and of itself, has no lasting eternal value. The only way to impart lasting worth to wealth is to use it as God directs.

It is not the dollar that gives value to the owner, but the owner who gives value to the dollar by how he uses it.

The misuse of wealth brings judgment on the owner, but proper use of wealth accrues treasure in heaven for the godly steward.

The poor is lifted up knowing that they have the same spiritual blessings as the rich. God does not think less of give them less because of their earthly status.

The rich are humbled by knowing that even though they are rich on this earth, they are still subject to the same trials and problems as the poor. Riches do not bring happiness, they are only temporary and are nothing compared to the riches we have in Christ

CLOSING

There will be a day, where every person will stand before God, both rich and poor. On that day we will be judged by what we had but it won't be riches.

We will be judged by whether or not we had a relationship with Jesus Christ or not. It alone will be the determining factor whether or not we are permitted to heaven.

It is in this decision (what you have - Jesus) that you will be judged on the basis of what you did with what you had. If you **really** have Jesus, you will obey Him.

If you **really** have Jesus, you will be more and more like Him, and less and less like you!