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HIGH/LOW

JAMES 1:9-11

INTRO/RECAP

- Been diving into a Book of the Bible — **James/Jacob**
- A few things to note up front:
 - This **doesn't read like one of Paul's letters** — addressing specific/pointed problems his audience was facing — **It's more a summary of some of James' sage wisdom to all Jesus-followers**
 - And **Jame's goal isn't necessarily to teach new theological information** — Rather — **He wants to get all up in our business and challenge the way that we're living that out**
- And you'll notice — and we'll call out — some of Jame's sources that he was heavily influenced by (i.e. **Sermon On The Mount**, the **Book of Proverbs**, and **Mary**)
- **James is calling us to live into true wisdom — through faith (DEFINE) — that embodies Jesus' teaching on what it truly means to live out his Kingdom ethic.**
- Last 2 weeks — trials, troubles, suffering — really, most of Chapter 1
 - **vv. 2-4**
 - For James/Jacob — “**steadfastness**”/“**endurance**” is NOT a goal BUT a means to a goal
 - The goal being that suffering produces **teleios/perfection/maturity**
 - **vv. 5-8**
 - IF we read **vv. 5-8** out of context — we might think they are about faith/hope/prayer/wisdom in general.
 - **vv. 5-8** — like **vv. 9-11** this morning — are explicitly linked to **vv. 2-4**
 - Suffering/trials can either make us **better or bitter!**
 - Suffering/trials don't automatically make us “**perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**” — wisdom must lead us there!



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- “To ask for “wisdom” is almost to ask for an ability to “endure” with the ethic of Jesus (justice (1:20), love (2:8–11), and peace (3:18)) when pressure is put on people to live otherwise.” — McKnight

EXPOSITION

- This gets us to **vv. 9-11** — The deeper we dive into James — the more we’ll see that economic stress and how to best respond to it are foremost on the list of things **pressuring** the people of God
- And economic justice is a common thread in the Scriptures — We see it in:
 - ...reading the Magnificat (**Luke 1:46–55**),
 - ...Jesus’ inaugural sermon (**4:16–30**),
 - ...the (Lukan) Beatitudes (**6:20–26**),
 - ...Jesus’ comment to the disciples of John the Baptist (**7:18–23**),
 - ...the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (**16:19–31**)
 - ...the same in the concerns of the early Christ community in Jerusalem (**Acts 2:43–47; 4:32–35**)
- The more we study/understand James — the more we should NOT be surprised that **vv. 9–11** brings this issue up: **the tension of the poor and wealthy is uppermost in the mind of James.**
- **v. 9**
 - “**lowly**” — can be social or spiritual condition — BUT James most likely has a social condition in mind
 - Probably not coincidence — it’s the same word James/Jacob and Jesus’ mom, **Mary**, used in her song (**Luke 1:48, 52-53**):

*for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed.*

*He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;*



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*he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

- “**brother**” — every other reference to “**brother**” in James refers to the “brotherhood of community,” — **James is speaking to the Christian brotherhood (and sisterhood).**
- “**boast in his/her exaltation**” — boasting correlates to “**joy**” in **v. 2**
 - connects the exhortation to “**boast**” with the **goal** of **vv. 2-4**
 - The goal being that suffering produces **teleios/perfection/maturity**
 - So James is getting at the idea that to “boast” in the sense of learning to see through financial challenges — economic tests — as **opportunities to produce spiritual formation!**
 - “**exaltation**” means to “be raised up”
 - and here in **v. 9** — it isn’t only talking about our eternal exaltation or being reconciled to God
 - because it’s connected to **vv. 2-4** — it’s also talking about moral formation and wisdom — and by extension, a life dedicated to pursuing “**justice**” (1:20), “**love**” (2:8–11), and “**peace**” (3:18).
 - So we boast NOT ONLY in our future vindication (i.e. 1 Peter), but we “**boast**” or have “**joy**” in the transformative experience of economic tests!
 - **[PAUSE]** — Let that settle for a minute — Because I’m not sure most of us are “**boast[ing]**” or having “**joy**” in the transformative experience of economic testing — financial hardships — or simply not having enough money!
- **And nothing in the world has trained us to do so!**
 - The world says that the means to “**joy**” is through **comfort, performance, approval, or control** — AND money/wealth is often the quickest way to get those things!
 - Hear me — we’re not just dealing with economic theories here
 - We’re dealing with worship and idolatry
 - That’s where **vv. 10-11** stand as an intense warning!



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- **vv. 10-11**
 - Important exegetical [DEFINE] question — **is the “rich” a “brother” or not?**
 - Commentaries are split — but warning is severe either way!
 - IF the “rich” is a “brother”/Christian — tempted to think too much of himself because the world holds him in high esteem, James says: **take pride not in your money or in your social position—things that are doomed all too soon to fade away forever—but, paradoxically, in your humble status as a person who identifies with one who was “despised and rejected” by the world.**
 - IF the “rich” is not a “brother”/Christian (my view) — James sees the “rich” as **enemies to the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus**, and his words must be taken as prophet-like irony: **the “boasting” and “exaltation” of the rich will shortly turn to humiliation!**

EXHORTATION

- **The only thing that CAN train us to be the countercultural community of Jesus is his counter-formative Kingdom ethic!**
- We must be convinced to see poverty/wealth in the way that Christ sees it!
- No doubt that James was intimately familiar with his brother’s teaching — few as recognizable or pointed as **Matthew 6:19-24:**
 - The follower of Jesus — those who have committed their lives to Jesus and his Kingdom vision — and who let that vision frame all of life — are told NOT to store up treasures on earth.
 - **Treasures** here **mean possessions** — BUT NOT JUST possessions in themselves.
 - **Jesus is specifically prohibiting his disciples from accumulating things for the focus or intent of finding JOY in them.**
 - **Do you see this?**
 - Things are not intrinsically bad — **finding all your JOY in them is** — and Jesus says not to!
 - His point is that these things are temporary



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- And if they're viewed in their proper place — this can actually help us keep his Kingdom and our “**exaltation**” in front of us!
- So Jesus commands us to store up treasures that last
 - Here, treasures move from things we value that are temporary — to things we value that are moral and eternal
 - **So we're led to ask — “What lasts?”**
 - And the answer — I think — is love (cf. **1 Corinthians 13**)
 - We can focus on the eternal if we reorient our love for temporary things — and instead live our lives to love God and others
 - **What Jesus is saying here is explicit — what we value — i.e. our treasures — which are measured by where and how we spend our energies — indicates where our heart — or the center of our passion — is.**
 - Jesus closes this thought with **v. 24**
 - Our affections are for either one or the other — not both.
 - For Jesus, there's a plain choice:
 - Run on the treadmill of finding joy in money and possessions and the comfort they bring
 - Or live for God recognizing his Kingdom is the only thing worth our time, energy, effort, and praise.
- City Parish — I want us all to be “**lowly**” and to “**boast in our exaltation**”
 - Will we “**consider it all joy**” **IF** some of the “**trials of various kinds**” that we “**meet**” include financial hardship/injustice/disparity/dissatisfaction?
 - Will we “**let steadfastness have its full effect**” of making us “**perfect and complete, lacking in nothing?**”
 - And when we “**lack wisdom**” — **especially as it pertains to how we are tempted to approach money/wealth/poverty** — will we ask God, who “**gives generously**” [out of his infinite riches of love, grace, mercy, power, etc.] “**to all without reproach?**”