

The World According to Jim
"When the %\$#@ Hits the Golden Fan"
James 1:9-11

Introduction

- [Sidney Greidanus](#), in his book Preaching Christ from Genesis tells the story of the nuclear attack submarine *Thresher*. This sub was outfitted with heavy steel bulkheads and heavy steel armor so it could dive deep and withstand the pressure of the ocean. On a test run in 1963 the *Thresher's* nuclear engine quit and it couldn't make it back to the surface. The sub sank. As it descended into the deep the pressure on the sub multiplied one atmosphere for every ten meters it sank. Eventually the heavy steel bulkheads buckled. The *Thresher* was crushed with 129 people inside. The worst submarine disaster in US history.
- The Navy went on a search for the *Thresher* and eventually found it at a depth of 8,400 feet. It was crushed like an egg shell. And no wonder because at that depth the pressure is an astounding 3,600 pounds per square inch.
- What was surprised the Navy was the fish. Tons of them. Fish with skin millimeters thick swimming around uncrushed; with no steel armor to protect them. How? Because the pressure on the inside of the fish was the same as the pressure on the outside.¹
- I know that for some of you this series from James has touched a nerve. Many of you have come to me and told me about your trials, the tests you are facing right now. And I can hear it in your voices. The pressure is intense; the trial is crushing. 1 John 4:4, *he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world*. God is greater than your trial. He will keep you from being crushed.
- Rich's message last week was perfect timing wasn't it? Because in the midst of the trial we are confronted with the question "is God is enough? Is God enough for my trial? Is he big enough? Can I withstand the pressure without getting crushed?" And the answer is an overwhelming yes. Psalm 23. Our cup is full and overflowing. God is sufficient. He is more than enough for the trial you are facing.
- At first glance it seems like the words of James 1:9-11 are unrelated to the theme of trials. All this business about poor Christians in humble circumstances. And rich Christians passing away like flowers withering in the heat. What does that have to do with trials? Lots. I'll show you how. For the moment I just want you to notice how these verses are sandwiched between two sections that clearly refer to trials. Starting in [verse 2](#). *Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds*. Then the prayer for wisdom when facing a trial. [Verse 5](#). *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him*. And then skipping ahead to [verse 12](#) which we'll look at next week. *Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him*. Right in the middle are verses 9-11. The context of these three verses? Trials. That's how we've got to read James' words here. So what's James' point? What is James trying to say? The words of James 1:9-11 are a warning. [[Slide #3](#)]

¹ Sidney Greidanus, Preaching Christ from Genesis (Eerdmans, 2007), pp. 492-493.

Proposition

- **Don't trust in material possessions or wealth to see you through your trial**
- Again, if you'll remember James is not just talking about persecution here. The word for trials is a much broader word than just persecution. *Verse 2. Trials of many kinds.* Many-colored, variegated, various kinds of trials. It's a word used of both outward trials and inward temptations.² Basically any difficult situation, everyday troubles—inward or outward—that's what James has in view in this section. **Don't trust in material possessions or wealth to see you through your trial.**
- When we're in the middle of a trial the temptation is to find sufficiency in things, in stuff, in money, in possessions in order to make it through the trial. The extra ten grand in bank gives a false sense of security. That pension you have to fall back on, James says don't do it. Your iPod will not make your trial any easier. The new car with leather doesn't change the fact that you still have to walk through the trial. Last I checked, the boat or the four-wheeler or the new pair of jeans, they don't care about your trial.
- But we do this all the time don't we? Just think for a second about the place or thing you run to with the going gets tough, when you're run through the ringer. Back to the picture of the sinking sub, we fortify our lives with all kinds of stuff; we rely on the bulkheads of material possessions and wealth to fortify our lives against the pressures of the trial. But James says those things won't keep you, they can't keep you from being crushed by the trial. **So don't trust in material possessions or wealth to see you through your trial.**
- When it comes to trials James actually says the wealthy are actually at a disadvantage.³ An easy life of wealth with lots of stuff around us makes God less of a necessity during a trial and makes us more prone to crushing. In the World According to Jim wealth and possessions and money make trials more difficult.

Transition

[Slide #4] I want you to notice...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two responses to trials depending upon if you have less or if you have more**

Background

- Before we dig into *verses 9-11* let me say a bit about wealth. There is nothing wrong with wealth per se. In fact, numerous passages in scripture describe wealth positively. On the other hand, there are many passages in the Bible that clearly state that wealth, money, possessions are a hindrance to discipleship. And so we get warnings like 1 Timothy 6:9-10,17-19 *People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*
- Now listen to 1 Timothy 6:17 as it relates to what James says. *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so*

² Reinecker, p. 721.

³ Baker and Ellsworth, p. 13.

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. The question for us this morning is what are we boasting in? We are the rich Christians. When the you know what hits the fan where is our confidence? In wealth? Or in God? Golden fans still spread the you know what. **Don't trust in material possessions or wealth to see you through your trial.**

Transition

Look at [verse 9](#). Listen again. Follow along. *The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.* Verse 9 describes how you should respond to trials if you have less. In other words, if you're facing a trial and you are in the position of being economically challenged what should be your response? [[Slide #5](#)] Rejoice. Boast James says. Without a doubt it is **better to go through a trial with less than with more.**

Main Points

- James' point is that if you are a follower of Christ wealth will put you at a disadvantage when it comes to trials. Stuff makes it harder to put your trust in God during the trial. So the *brother*, that's James' way of saying Christian, *the brother* in humble circumstances should take pride, boast, rejoice. Why? Because during a trial the poor are actually at an advantage compared to the rich Christian. **It's better to go through a trial with less than with more.**
- The word James uses for *humble circumstances* or low position is a word that means poor or without possessions.⁴ James has in mind the poor Christian. The impoverished Christian. I think the [New Living Translation](#) nails it on the head when it translates [verse 9](#) *Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them.*
- James says that during a trial the poor Christian should boast. The poor are able to cry Psalm 20:7 *Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.* Their response is boasting in the Lord. Why? Because there isn't a smorgasbord of things to boast in or put your confidence in. The poor have had many of their crutches stripped away. Therefore, the Christian in the position of poverty is at an advantage during trials.
- To use a tennis analogy, you against the trial in a match. The score's not deuce. If you're poor its advantage Christian. During a trial it's just you and God. Which isn't a bad thing as James says. That's something worth boasting about. Poverty is not a disadvantage during a trial when all you have left to rely on is God.
- Here's the deal. I honestly don't know how many of us fit into this first category of the poor Christian. Certainly there is a range of economic prosperity within this church. But are we really poor? We may fall under the poverty line according to US standards but according to the standards of the rest of the world are we poor? For most of us the next two verses hit a lot closer to home.
- I do know for some of you the trial you're facing right now is a financial one. In some sense James would say you are doubly blessed. First there is the blessing of the trial itself, a

⁴ Reinecker, p. 722.

spiritual opportunity, [verses 3 and 4](#). Then there is the exalted position of not having much materially. It is a blessing to have the material props knocked out from underneath you so that you have nowhere else to turn but God. *The brother in humble circumstances ought to take pride in his high position.* Does not James also say in chapter two verse 5, *listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?*

- Don't hang your head. There's no shame. According to God you are in a favored position of having your senses fine tuned so that you are completely dependent upon God maybe even for that next meal or that next bill. And don't worry. God takes care of his children. God will take care of you. **It's better to go through a trial with less than with more.**

Transition

[Slide #6] Look at [verses 10-11](#). Again, as American Christians these verses hit a little closer to home. If you're facing a trial and you are in the position of being economically wealthy what should be your response? *But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. 11 For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.* How does wealth put you at a disadvantage during a trial? **Riches are utterly worthless in the face of trials.** So put all your hope in God not in your stuff.

- The same advice is given to the rich Christian as the poor Christian. Boast. Same word. *Take pride.* But for the rich they are not to boast in their socio-economic condition. They are to boast in their low position as a Christian. *But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position.* James challenges the rich Christian, as [Doug Moo](#) puts it, "to boast not in his wealth or his elevated social position, but in his identification with Christ and his people, a matter of humiliation in the eyes of the world."⁵ Why? Because **riches are utterly worthless in the face of trials.**
- To make his point James gives us a proverbial statement about wealth and possessions. They don't last. They are fragile. They are useless during trials. Like wild flowers that wilt in the burning heat and in the blistering east wind of the Sirocco, they are withered and destroyed.⁶ [Verse 11.](#) *For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.*
- I want you to notice something very important. This is the most important thing I'll say all morning. This whole message is built on this observation right here. James doesn't just say that riches and wealth and possessions will pass away and fade and wither and will be destroyed. That is true. Jesus reminds us of that in Luke 12:13-21, the parable of the rich fool. But that's not his point. Look at the text. What does he say? He says *the rich man*, the rich Christian, *will fade away even while he goes about his business.* In [verse 10](#) James says *he will pass away like a wild flower.*
- James is trying to tell you not to **trust in wealth or money or possessions to see you through your trial.** Because if you do you will fade away even while you go about your business.

⁵ Moo, p. 66.

⁶ Reinecker, p. 722.

You will not last in the trial. It'll burn you. It'll wither you. Your faith will be destroyed because you've put your hope into things that A) don't care about your trial and B) can't help you anyway. Stuff makes it harder to put your trust in God. As rich Christians we are actually at a disadvantage when it comes to facing trials. We are more prone to crushing. In your trial if you put your trust in money or wealth or possession instead of in God you will pass away like a wild flower withering in the heat.

- So what are we to do? Instead of putting our hope in things that fail we are to put our hope in the God who never fails. *"The Mighty One, God, the LORD! The Mighty One, God, the LORD."*⁷ *O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you.*⁸ Jeremiah 9:23. *This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD. And God will see you through your trial. God is greater than your trial. He will keep you from being crushed. 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."*⁹
- The question for us this morning is what are we boasting in? Where is our hope? Who are you really trusting in to see you through your trial? Who is your master? Who is your king?

Conclusion

- [\[Show video\]](#)

⁷ Joshua 22:22

⁸ Psalm 89:8

⁹ 1 Timothy 6:17