

## ADVANTAGES OF ADVERSITY

James 1:9-12

A Christian man in Zambia recently explained that the biggest problem facing them was not from the world but from what professing Christianity beams via satellite to the televisions. The Hollywood version of Christianity has confused bigness and showmanship with the Savior. James confronted such distortions in his day and left us a powerful statement on how a Christian looks when facing adversity.

The fact is real Christians face real adversities. Life is full of turns and twists, roadblocks and obstacles, threats and pains. Rather than being immune to these things, we are shaped by them into conformity to Jesus Christ. Wisdom utilized in trials leads to true happiness for the Christian.

### I. WISDOM AT WORK

Some commentators suggest James is beginning a new subject. But the tie-in with the previous discussion on trials and the application of wisdom is the most obvious view of this passage. We have already noted that the wisdom that God gives helps us to see our circumstances from God's perspective, to stand in dependence on God, and to take appropriate actions in light of the trials we face. James highlights two extremes:

1. The poor man. Poverty in the early church was rampant. Most people lived in poverty and yet shared to help each other. As the recipients of James' epistle were scattered due to persecution, they found their poverty increasing. On top of everything else, there was a famine about this time in the land. What is his encouragement for them? **THE BROTHER OF HUMBLE CIRCUMSTANCES IS TO GLORY IN HIS HIGH POSITION.**

(1) belonging. **BROTHER** governs the meaning of poor and rich and applies to both. He aptly points out that they are not strapped by the allures of wealth that seems to actually bring harm to some. After Jesus spoke with the "rich young ruler" He explained: **HOW HARD IT WILL BE FOR THOSE WHO ARE WEALTHY TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** The poor have nothing to fill their minds, so they find themselves opened to the work of God.

(2) **BOASTING.** James tells the lw to **GLORY IN HIS HIGH POSITION.** Paradoxically, his position is not low by virtue of being in Christ. He is in an exalted position, a place of great esteem. The word **GLORY** means **BOAST** or **REJOICE**. The verb calls for continual action. What is this **HIGH POSITION** in which He is to **GLORY**? It is the grand reality that he belongs to Christ – something no man can take from him

As the Christian considers his condition apart from Christ and the fact that God has shown Him grace, it produces a different attitude. Rich or poor, our focus is not to be on our material state, but on Christ.

### 2. THE RICH MAN

Alec Motyer has written, “The Bible is clear that the problems of prosperity are as keen as those of stringency. Indeed, they constitute, if anything, a more insidious threat to a committed life to God. James will have more to say about wealth and its problems later, but for the moment, he focuses upon those brothers to see that their wealth and possessions are not to be the focus of their life. **AND THE RICH MAN IS TO GLORY IN HIS HUMILIATION, BECAUSE LIKE FLOWERING GRASS HE WILL PASS AWAY.**”

In reading Paul Johnson’s History of the American People, one is amazed at how so many people with nothing to their names have followed the American Dream and amassed fortunes. Many of those same people lost their fortunes as well. Opulence, greed, deceit, and corruption often followed the trails of these prosperous. Rare is it to see many of them turning to Christ by faith and walking in humility.

(1) A Different View.

The Bible does not condemn wealth or riches but it does condemn the love of wealth and riches. Abraham was a wealthy man, yet he kept his focus on the Lord. But in contrast, those who worship wealth perish with their god. By telling the rich man to **GLORY IN HIS HUMILIATION**, he reverses what he had said to the poor. The poor sees His riches and the rich sees his poverty.

It is no secret that for most rich people, life consists in the things they have gathered around them and the expectation of what they will yet have. For the Christian, a new perspective comes into play – **LIKE FLOWERING GRASS ALL WILL PASS AWAY.** Earthly wealth is not eternal wealth

Every man comes to Christ in the same way – **HUMILITY.** The rich man is to maintain this same spirit. He is not to revert to dependence on anything else. Once a London Newspaper held a contest to decide the best definition of money. The winning entrant said: “Money is an article which may be used as a universal passport to anywhere except heaven and as a universal provider of everything except happiness.

(2) Reality sets in when we read **FOR THE SUN RISES WITH A SCORCHING WIND AND WITHERS THE GRASS; AND ITS FLOWER FALLS OFF AND THE BEAUTY OF ITS APPEARANCE IS DESTROYED; SO TOO THE RICH MAN IN THE MIDST OF HIS PURSUITS WILL FADE AWAY.** This is definitely a verse for a reality check.

One newspaper told recently of the plight faced by a computer engineer with a six-figure income. He had a job with a well known computer firm when layoffs came. Instead of finding work, he ended up living on the streets and dumpster-diving for food.

O.K., you say. “I get it.” But what is all this leading to?

## II. THE TRULY HAPPY MAN

BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO PERSEVERES UNDER TRIAL; FOR ONCE HE HAS BEEN APPROVED, HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE WHICH THE LORD HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. Vaughan says this BLESSEDNESS speaks of an inner quality of happiness in God, a happiness not affected by outward circumstances. How is this man described?

1. He Perseveres Loyal. He is not talking about a man who is barely able to put one foot in front of another but a man with a triumphant spirit that walks through trials with blazing hope. Whether the trial is a disease, *loss of job*, or a rebellious child, that man stands firm
2. He stands tried and true. James explains that in the process of perseverance the believer anticipates that his faith will be tried and proven true: FOR ONCE HE HAS BEEN APPROVED, HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE.” The phrase HAS BEEN APPROVED refers to validating the genuineness or worth of something. Perseverance and patience in the midst of difficulties is something the world cannot grasp.
3. HE anticipates Eternity

This believer is promised HE WILL RECEIVE THE CROWN OF LIFE WHICH THE LORD HAS PROMISED TO THOSE WHO LOVE HIM. The future tense of the verb is pointing to something certain that lies ahead of the believer. It is that certainty that often becomes his greatest motivation to keep pressing forward. Paul explained: FOR I CONSIDER THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY THAT IS TO BE REVEALED TO US. AND NOT ONLY THIS, BUT ALSO WE OURSELVES, HAVING THE FIRST FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT, EVEN WE OURSELVES GROAN WITHIN OURSELVES, WAITING EAGERLY FOR OUR ADOPTION AS SONS, THE REDEMPTION OF OUR BODY.

What kept Paul going? Heaven. The CROWN OF LIFE was the victor’s crown, a wreath of laurel leaves placed on the head of one who succeeded at the Olympic games. One commentator calls it the “emblem of spiritual success, given by the King of the Universe to those who keep their faith in the midst of suffering and temptation.” It is a **CROWN** characterized by **LIFE**, specifically, eternal life

We often suffer from short-sightedness in our day. We can see all the present benefits of being Christians and certainly we have good motivation in these things. But the New Testament Saints and those who followed looked beyond the present and into eternity. They fixed their eyes upon Christ. They anticipated His presence and the sight of His glory. They looked forward to a total freedom from the presence of sin and an environment that redounds in holiness to the glory of God. That’s how they endured, by thinking properly and longingly upon an eternity with Christ.

4. He demonstrates His love for Christ. Our progress to the crown is expedited not by our powers of endurance but by the depth and reality of our love for Him. We live by what we love; the shape of our lives is determined by the joys of our hearts. The crown of life goes to HIM WHO LOVES HIM. So the root of true happiness is love for Christ. The passion of our heart, the longing of our life, the purpose of all existence is Him.

If there is no love for Christ or only a pretended love for Christ, then the trials and temptations of life will prove this out. The attraction of the world will have a greater allurement than Christ

Conclusion: Do you know this happiness? Not the accumulation of things, but to Lover of Your Soul?