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Beverly E.C.C, Chicago, IL

“PRIDE AND HUMILIATION”

James 1:9-12

? We like our money, don't we? That is not an accusation. It's an observation and a confession.

☑ “In God We Trust” is inscribed on our bills, and many of us do. Yet we also invest a great deal of trust in the currency itself, don't we?

We rely on money to purchase provisions for existence and luxuries for comfort. This is unavoidable in a modern economy. We cannot survive without money.

But we don't stop there. We also rely on money for security. We act as though it will protect us from human enemies, from boredom and anxiety and futility, and maybe even from death itself.

Not only so, we rely on it for social status and personal worth. We like to say every life has value; but evidently some are more valuable than others: our tax codes, government budgets, medical systems, educational structures, and pop culture favor the rich over the poor.

I am preaching to myself, here. I'm part of this, too.

? We cannot live without money. The question is, how can we live with it?

☐ In 1:9-12 “**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ**” invites us into a distinctive new relationship with money and possessions.

Any U.S. American who adheres to this teaching will stand out as an oddball. Nevertheless, inspired by the Holy Spirit, James presents this as *the* way to live with money.

■ Verse 9: “**Believers in humble circumstances**”, the underprivileged, the marginalized, the poor, “**ought to take pride in their high position.**”

{Jas 2:5} We can't dismiss this as a one-off. A bit later James explains: “**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...?**”

This isn't something *James* came up with. Hear the Word of God the Son, recorded in Luke 6:20-23:

²⁰ “**Blessed are you who are poor,**
[Those are “*humble circumstances.*”]
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ **Blessed are you who hunger now,**
[“*humble circumstances*”]
for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now,
[“*humble circumstances*”]
for you will laugh.

²² **Blessed are you when people hate you,**
when they exclude you and insult you
and reject your name as evil,
because of the Son of Man.”

[“*humble circumstances*”]

²³ **“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, [for] great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.”**

■ In contrast, verse 10a, **“the rich should take pride in their humiliation.”**

{Jas 5:5} Later, in chapter 5, James writes: **“You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.”**

As before, this isn’t original with *him*. The Son of God, speaking in Luke 6:24-26:

²⁴ **“Woe to you who are rich,
for you have already received your
comfort.**

[That is present elevation and future humiliation.]

²⁵ **Woe to you who are well fed now,
for you will go hungry.**

[present elevation and future humiliation]

**Woe to you who laugh now,
for you will mourn and weep.**

[present elevation and future humiliation]

²⁶ **Woe to you when everyone speaks well
of you,
for that is how their ancestors treated
the false prophets.”**

[present elevation and future humiliation]

To recap: **“Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation...”**

‡ We are immediately confronted with a dilemma: who are **“The rich”**?

☑ {CNBC} **“A 2013 survey by UBS found that only 28 percent of [U.S. Americans] worth \$1 million to \$5 million consider themselves wealthy.”** Just **“Sixty percent of those worth \$5 million or more said they’re wealthy.”**

Coming at it from the opposite direction, seventy-two percent of U.S. Americans with assets between \$1 and \$5 million claim not to be rich. Among those whose estates exceed \$5 million, forty percent say they aren’t.

I suspect that we prefer to identify as ‘middle class.’ But do you wear **“a gold ring”** and **“fine clothes”**? I do. According to James, I am rich (2:2).

Can you reasonably assume that you won’t die of malnutrition? Do you have **“daily food”**? I do. According to James, I am rich (2:15-16).

Is your closet full enough that you could give away some clothing without going naked yourself? I could. According to James, I am rich (2:15-16).

☑ {Global Rich List} Granted, I am dirt poor compared to the president. Still, with my salary and benefits, I am well within the top one percent worldwide. If your annual income totals \$32,425, so are you.

You might not be quite *that* affluent – but if your income after taxes adds up to a measly \$13,745, you are in the top ten percent. Ninety percent of humankind is in a lower economic bracket than you!

Dilemma solved. Most of us – all of us – are rich, compared to the rest of the world.

“Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation...”

? This is a headscratcher (let’s not pretend that it isn’t). Having wealth is a source of pride in this world. What is James talking about?

■ ¹⁰ **“The rich should take pride in their humiliation – since,”** verses 10b-11, **“they 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 will fade away even as they go about their business.”**

This is our **“humiliation”**: we rely on money to supply our needs and wants, yet it isn’t always enough. However much we have, we inevitably “need” more.

? We know this, but do we *believe* it? If we profess this belief, do our actions confirm it?

This is our **“humiliation”**: we rely on money for security, yet it fails us. We might hoard billions and still decrepitude or disease or disaster would claim us.

? We know this, but do we *believe* it? If we profess this belief, do our actions confirm it?

This is our **“humiliation”**: we rely on money for status and worth, but in vain. The richest person on earth is not worth a penny more than the poorest.

{Gen 1:27; Acts 17:28; Jn 3:16; II Tim 1:9; Gal 4:5} Who **“created [us] in his own image”**? In whom do **“we live and move and have our being”**? Who loves us so perfectly that **“he gave his one and only Son”** for us? Who has **“saved us and called us”**? Who has **“adopted**

[us] as his children”? Who imbues human beings with intrinsic importance?

Get this: riches mean nothing to him!

We need money to survive, so the Lord equips us with skills and opportunities to earn it. He is so generous that he sometimes arranges a windfall for us without any effort on our part.

★ All the same, riches mean nothing to God! In his eyes, a multi-billionaire is of absolutely no greater value than a penniless beggar.

? We know this, but do we *believe* it? If we profess this belief, do our actions confirm it?

? All wealth **“will pass away like a wild flower,”** and the parts of us that are devoted to it **“will fade away”** with it. **How can we live with money?** What must we do?

■ Verse 9: **“Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position.”**

☑ {NLT Study Note; Ro 8:17} **“The poor should be glad that riches mean nothing to God, otherwise [they] would be considered unworthy.”** Rejoice! In Jesus, **“we are ... heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”**

■ As for **“the rich,”** verse 10a, we **“should take pride in [our] humiliation.”**

The affluent should be glad that riches mean nothing to God, since they are so ultimately unreliable. Rejoice! In Jesus God has humbled us and realigned our value system to be congruent with his.

✎ James' exhortation is substantially the same for poor and rich alike: do not rely on money for security or significance. Instead, celebrate your dependency on the Living God who **“has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble”** (Luke 1:52).

We will probably be called on to shed blood, sweat, and tears in order to break our trust in wealth. This is unpleasant and unnatural – but it is well worth the effort.

■ James 1:12: **“Blessed are those who persevere under trial, because when they have stood the test, they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.”**

This verse is not unrelated to the previous ones. Poverty and riches are severe tests of spiritual maturity. Wealth, whether absent or abundant, makes seductive demands on us: Want me! Need me! Serve me! Worship me!

It takes great perseverance to love God above all and trust him best. Resisting mammon requires consistent, sustained discipleship, confirmed in moral integrity and acts of *αγαπη* [agape] love.

★ Money and possessions will fail us, but God won't. If we “[stand] **the test**” over the long haul, he will bestow upon us **“the crown of life that”** he **“has promised to those who love him.”**

We need money to purchase provisions for existence and comfort. We cannot live without it.

‡ Still, it presents us with terrible, potentially deadly temptations. (If that sounds like an exaggeration, consider

the rich young ruler who declined to receive life because he chose his wealth over following Jesus!) How can we live with it?

If we are **“in humble circumstances”** let us exult in our **“high position.”** If we are **“rich”** let us **“take pride in [our] humiliation.”**

James 1:9-12 is the word of the Lord.