

• Facing troubles with joy, patience and prayer

• Two kinds of trouble – poverty and wealth

• Some despising the poor

• Poverty is distressing

• But wealth easily stimulates spiritual weakness

1. The poor are to rejoice

• Chosen to hear the good news

• Reversal

• The poor need not feel intimidated

2. The rich are to rejoice

We are dealing with troubles and temptations. We have seen that we must respond to trouble with joy^{□1}, with patience^{□2} and with prayer^{□3}. This is God's way of advancing our spirituality: suffering. There are two very closely related themes in this chapter of James: trouble and temptation. In verses 2–12 he is dealing with troubles. In verses 13 onwards he deals with temptations.

Now James comes to two kinds of trouble: poverty and wealth. *'And let the lowly brother or sister rejoice greatly in his high position^{□1}, but let the rich person rejoice greatly in his humiliation, because he will pass away as does the flower of the field^{□2}. For the sun rises with its hot wind, and it dries up the plant, and its flower falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. In the same way also the rich man will fade away amidst his activities^{□3}. Blessed is the person 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^{□4}.*

Most of James' readers could be called 'middle-class'. They were not very wealthy but not poor either. Some of them were employers^{□1}. They wanted to be an upper-class church. They were despising the poor.

It is typical of the Bible to regard both poverty and wealth as 'testing' situations. We might be inclined to regard poverty as a testing and troublesome situation but wealth as a situation where you are free of trouble. Not so! Both are testing and troublesome situations. Paul could say 'I have learned to be self-sufficient whatever the circumstances'^{□1} and goes on to talk about being 'well-fed or hungry ... in plenty or in want.' Both sets of circumstances are tempting and testing. Poverty is distressing^{□2}, but very few people can become rich without growing spiritually weak^{□3}.

1. **The poor are to rejoice.** Of course they do not rejoice in poverty itself. But James does not pity the poor. They have something to rejoice about. They have something that lifts them up. 'Let the lowly brother or sister rejoice greatly in his high position.' The high privilege of the poor is that the gospel is especially designed for them. 'Good news is preached to the poor'^{□1}. Has God not chosen the poor^{□2}? It is possible to be rich in the things of God even while one is poor. Poor people can be generous^{□3}. God meets our needs^{□4}. One day the position of the godly poor will be reversed. They are people destined for exaltation. The poor may be provided for by God even in this life. But God can also reverse their position – now or in eternity.

Christians who are financially needy are not to feel intimidated. They must not think that rich people can be used in the kingdom of God but that they cannot. If you are a needy person, don't think that rich people or educated people can have a better grasp of the will of God than you. It is the other way around.

2. **The rich are to rejoice.** They are to rejoice in their humiliation! The rich man is also in a testing situation. It is not sin in itself to be rich. The rich man is not told to repent of his being rich. But the rich person should accept his humiliation. What is it? It is that the gospel is not

□1 1:2
□2 1:3-4
□3 1:5-8

□1 1:9
□2 1:10

□3 1:11

□4 1:12

□1 5:1-6

□1 Philippians 4:11
□2 Proverbs 10:15
□3 see Proverbs 30:8; Ecclesiastes 5:13-1; Matthew 13:22; 19:23-24; 1 Timothy 6:9-10, 17-19

□1 Matthew 11:50
□2 James 2:5; see also Luke 6:20, 24; 16:19-31
□3 2 Corinthians 8:2
□4 2 Corinthians 9:8-11

• *No special treatment for the rich*

• *Identification with the poor*

• *Generosity without gullibility*

• *What you use for God*

3. The rich and poor are to live for God's promise

• *A crown*

• *Begins now and confirmed in heaven*

specially designed for him. He gets no special treatment. There is no special chair in the church for him or for her. There is no automatic position in the church. There are no special advantages with God. The rich man must accept that his position will one day be reversed. Riches are part of what is perishing in this world (see Luke's words¹).

The rich man can hardly experience the blessings of the kingdom of God – but there is one way. Let the rich Christian identify with the poor. If the gospel is tailor-made for the poor – and it is – the secret of blessing is to identify with the poor. I spend a lot of time with quite poor people. It is the greatest privilege in the world. I experience blessings from God that the wealthy know scarcely anything about. It is one of the greatest privileges in the world.

If you are wealthy, make sure you are generous (not with gullibility but with God-given wisdom). Watch your attitudes. If you are rich don't be arrogant. If you are poor, don't be intimidated. Realize that money is really not a very important matter at all. It is simply part of this world's situation. It is not eternal. Everything will change at death, and your situation might change even in this life.

You can never lose what you use for God. Remember that you are under test. Your attitude to money is a testing situation whether you are rich or poor. The crown of life depends on how you handle temptation.

3. The rich and the poor are to live for God's promise. To both the needy and the not-so-needy God says 'Blessed is the person who perseveres under trial ...'. Whether you are poor or not-so-poor, you are under test. But when you have passed God's test by handling your poverty or your wealth aright, there is a crown of life for you.

A crown is something a king or queen gets. The blessing for passing God's test is kingship! And the crown is 'life'. When you pass God's tests you receive a fresh assurance that you are reigning with Christ. You receive a fresh enabling, a fresh coronation, fresh joy. You don't have to wait until heaven to get it; it begins even now and then in heaven it is confirmed and multiplied.

¹ Luke 1:51-53; 12:13-26



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)* books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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