



Lesson 2 February 25, 2010

"Rich Man, Poor Man"

Introduction

In the text of his letter, James briefly leaves the theme of trials and temptations with an interesting digression into a commentary on worldly riches and materialism. This is an important subject which he will address repeatedly throughout his letter, and it is one that each of us should carefully consider in our own lives. He contrasts the poor man and the rich man, but he subtly suggests that neither one can trust in any personal or material resource but that each one must trust in the heavenly Father and depend upon Him for strength, guidance, wisdom, and the provision of daily needs.

1. In verse 9, James encourages the poor man to rejoice (yet another imperative to be joyful in the Lord) in that he is exalted through Christ's grant of spiritual riches that are eternal and cannot be taken from him. How do these verses emphasize this thought?

Proverbs 8:18-21

Romans 8:17

I Corinthians 2:9

2. In verse 10, James warns the rich man to be humble because he will soon fade away, as will his earthly, perishable riches. The rich man must resist the temptation (more on that subject throughout the book) to trust in those riches. How do these passages underscore James's point?

Deuteronomy 8:18

Psalms 49:6-12, 16-17



Lesson 2 February 25, 2010

Matthew 16:26

Mark 10:24

3. In verse 11, James repeats his point, for sake of emphasis and import, from the previous verse that the beauty of the flower quickly fades away, so too will the rich of this world fade away and be largely forgotten. James unveils an underlying theme of the brevity of life which he will develop throughout his epistle and which should encourage all of us to put more emphasis on the heavenly and the eternal, knowing that this life with its cares and difficulties will soon end. What encouragement and further commentary do these verses offer?

Psalms 39:4-5; 103:14-16

2 Peter 3:10-12?

1 John 2:17

What perspective on the rich and the poor do you find in this verse?

Proverbs 22:2



Lesson 2 February 25, 2010

Personal Application

Since God is the maker of both the rich man and the poor man (Proverbs 22:2), and since He knows each one of us in the womb (Psalm 139:13–16), and since He has chosen us even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), should not we exercise the faith of a believing heart and mind that James has, earlier in the chapter, emphasized and trust Him in whatever place of material abundance or want that He has placed us according to His limitless wisdom?

While the majority of believers, as well as all who dwell on the earth, will not have the riches or abundance that each of us to some degree seek, we should heed the fact that the Bible has many warnings for the rich but none for the poor. Indeed, material resources can be a spiritual hindrance for many who are tempted to trust in their assets instead of the Lord for “they that seek to be rich fall into a temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1Timothy 6:9 -10).

Jesus Himself declared “how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:24-25), warned about “the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22), and asked “for what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul” (Matthew 16:26). Solomon, having acquired great wealth, lamented that having riches brought with it more and more problems (Ecclesiastes 5:11) and that “riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle to heaven” (Proverbs 23:5).

James, like the Psalmists before him, reminds us that life is short and that the worldly glory of the rich will fade as quickly as the summer flower. May we heed his exhortations and embrace the reality that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1Timothy 6:6) for we will soon enter into eternity without our earthly possessions to, prayerfully with our Lord’s help, hear these words: “well done!”