



James / Faith that Works - Wk. 4
"The Humbling of the Rich and Poor"
By Pastor Jody May 09/20/2026

[CALL TO HEAR]

James 1:9-11 ESV

⁹Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

**Pastor – "People of God, this is the Word of God."
People – "Thanks be to God."**

Pray

Illustration

One of our more modern dilemmas that we should not be having is in the questions of self-identification. You know it used be a joke when Senator Elizabeth Warren would claim she is part Native American. Everyone would look at that very blond hair and blue eyes and knew that was not true. She used that status on her registration for the BAR as an attorney and professor at Harvard Law School. That's no joke, she used a false claim to get notoriety and a leg up in life claiming she was something she was not. According to her DNA test in 2018 she at best could have been 1/64th (6 generations) back, part Native American. Look, I am 1/8th Cherokee, and I would never consider using that to identify myself for anything. But that is not how the rest of this world thinks now a days.

The world says you can elevate your status based upon your own idea of whatever you think you are. If you want to identify as another nationality, because it gets you ahead in the receiving of federal aid, you go ahead and try that, it may work out for you. If you want to be known as non-binary or some other sex outside of your assigned sex on your birth certificate, you can try that out too. It may get you noticed by the tribe of people you like or get you the job in the *wokish* place of your choosing. Who knows, it may even get you on the winner's podium in a sports field making you feel better about your



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athletic ability in life. The world will even let you wear animal costumes in public and you can bark like a dog, use a cat box like a feline, if that's what makes you feel better. **Problem** - You see we have become a society steeped in the pursuit of trying to personally define ourselves to achieve a status in this world that makes us feel special. It has become the pursuit of Salvation for the new world gnostic, pick your identity and believe in it and you too can achieve self-satisfaction.

Introduction

The problem with that, based on the rise in drug abuse, therapeutic practices and interventions, and now AI best friends that praise you, is that quest for self-identification to feel better is not working. People are NOT finding fulfillment in attempts at self-identifying, to achieve a status that they think is good for themselves. **Answer** - The truth is that only in understanding, accepting, and boasting in our Identity/status given us by God can we ever truly be happy with who we are in this world. You see that is the great thing about the Gospel, it doesn't ask you to change first to become better, or become someone else to be acceptable, rather it changes you by God's intervention and His changing of your heart which brings you into the highest order of people one can ever aspire to.

James will teach us this fact in verses 9-11 and here is the conclusion I think we should get to today.

MP

Worldly status is fleeting and false, while the believer's true standing is found in their exaltation by God.

The first place we will look at in accepting a true status that is defined by God is in James calling for us to **Boast in lowly exaltation**. That is, we should stay away from boasting in what we do to elevate ourselves and instead boast in God's exaltation of us. Then we will look at the **boasting of the rich's humiliation** and that becoming a Christ follower means the surrender of an exalted earthly status, to be humbled. Lastly, we will briefly look at the reason why, in the **understanding the fading glory of an earthly life**.



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1. Boasting in lowly exaltation.

⁹ Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation,
(But)

From last week I want to reread the last 2 verses: ⁷ *For that person (the one who lacks faith when they ask for wisdom) must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."*

Now there is a conjunction there that you can't see in your translation that comes at the beginning of verse 9, **Καυχάσθω δὲ ὁ** - **(BUT)** **ἀδελφὸς** it is simply 'but'. Interpretation is "**BUT, instead of being like that person that doesn't receive anything from God, BOAST as the one that has received exaltation from Him!**" James says don't be like that guy who is doubleminded, one foot in the world and one foot in the church. BUT embrace your life for God and **Boast** in being exalted for Him!

Isn't boasting a sin?

Boasting is not something though in scripture that one would typically encourage.

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may **boast**.

There is nothing you did to contribute to your Salvation, that was a gift, so don't boast in that process like you had a hand in it, Faith is a gift not a work. That same message is put to us in a different way in Romans 3.

Romans 3:27-28 ESV

²⁷ Then what becomes of our **boasting**? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.



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Boasting is excluded/removed from us because faith has nothing to do with work of your hand. You did not earn Salvation by your merit.

To sum that up, and point to where this boasting comes from, James has something to say about that later in his letter -

James 4:16 ESV

As it is, you **boast** in your **arrogance**. All such boasting is **evil**.

Boasting in works, in anything that you think elevates your status and position, that is arrogance and that is evil! Ok, so that can't be what James means here in v.9. *let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation* (what he's not saying - *boast in what was achieved by your work*), because if that is what he meant we have a contradiction in scripture. So, there may be some other type of boasting going on here in the text today, that is permissible that comes not from arrogance in one's own works.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV

²³ Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts **boast in this, that he understands and knows me**, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

We are to boast in 'knowing/experiencing' the God who practices steadfast love towards His people. That is what James is commenting on here. The boast here that is commanded by James, that's the 4th command btw if you are keeping track, is to boast in one's exaltation/lifting up while in a [lowly](#) status, BOAST in that exaltation; the experience of having love, justice, and righteousness put upon you already! What does that even mean to be exalted when that is the opposite of lowly, how is one exalted in lowliness, it's oxymoronic?

It means to the people that James is preaching to, that your lowly status is not a sign of not being loved

1st Command - Count trials all joy!

2nd Command - Submit to Sanctification - Let maturing be perfected in you!

3rd Command - Ask God for wisdom in faith without doubt!

4th Command boast in your exaltation and humiliation



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by God. That whether in a lowly status or an elevated status we don't boast in a **WORLDLY STATUS** we boast in Christ alone!

You see most the people in James's day, in his church were lowly, most likely poor, without station in life, just etching out an existence. **(The Ecuadorian example)** That is nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to be upset about. It is to be appreciated and not spurned because the rich, who he compares them to in today's verses, often have trouble getting into the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 19:24 ESV

²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

In that day James, as you will see in later passages, has a lot of anti-prosperity Gospel to preach against. You see, the Jews for a long time held to the belief that your status and your bank account is what showed your favoritism with God. **BUT** Jesus came for the lowly, directly to them in an earthly lowly family, to be born among them in a lowly condition in a manger, so they would know He lowered Himself to the basest of all positions as men. He unites with them through that lowly status to become the Son of Man. Even though, while being born into the Kingly line He never pursued an earthly throne nor title.

2 Corinthians 8:9 ESV

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

Jesus comes to the lowly man, to make him Kingdom rich! It is the exaltation of the lowly, the humbled, the poor in Spirit. **James says BUT let that lowly brother BOAST in the exalted state that Christ has brought them into!** We as people are not changed by self-identifying, but change is quickened when we identify what Christ has done in us!

Today family, you may feel like you are forgotten, that you are not respected, that no one knows your name, that too though is a blessing, because God is protecting you from the things that get so many people lost in this world, fame and riches. But there will come a day when you do get noticed, and then the



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question becomes, *who will you boast in?* Will it be in your works or God's? You see this passage is tied into verses 2-4, this is all about the trials that all Christians will face in their lives. Will you be arrogant and believe that you got where you did in life by your hands, or will you give glory to God?

Faith is strengthened and your joy is made complete the day someone asks you about your life, why is it different, why do you not self-identify like other people, why can't life keep you down, what's your secret? That my friend is when you get to boast in exaltation that ties directly into God's glory! (example of giving God glory for family blessings). Many of you have already been through a trial where you have been able to exalt the name of Christ in you, some of you it is still to come, and others where we have failed will get another chance for God is graciously steadfast and forgiving to His people. Don't abhor a lowly, humble, non-exciting status friend but be ready to boast in Jesus, what He has done in you, to change your outlook on this world.

2. Boasting in the rich's humiliation.

10a and the rich in his humiliation,

James is calling now on the rich to boast in their humiliation. Ok that statement can throw one off a little in how it is given. When you read James through a couple of times you see in chapter 2 and chapter 5 that he has issue with the rich and what they are doing. It is not as though that they are not a part of the church, it is just that the well-off have a unique set of problems they must pay attention to and particular set of sins that they fall into. That adds difficulty to their life, they are prone to trials that most people in his day would not have. I would just like to remind us as well, because we live in America, a 1st world country, participating in the westernized version of the evangelical church, most of us should pay attention to those reprimands for we too suffer from the problems of the wealthy.

Even though he is contrasting the rich to the lowly it does not mean though the rich in this verse are not a part of the church. The syntax in the Greek leads to the reading of **both the lowly and the rich are brothers**, they are Christians. The lowly is to boast in their exaltation and the rich is to boast in their



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humiliation. Either way you look at it, the desired attitude and demeanor of the Christian is to be humble! Remember that phrase from when we studied Zephaniah, ***humiliation leads to exaltation***. It is the path for all believers to learn your lessons, to embrace brokenness so that we too like Christ may be exalted for the Glory of God's Kingdom.

John Stott, Famous theologian from the 20th century said it best I think, *"To financial adversities, the poor believer says, 'But how rich I am!' To earthly glories, the rich believer says, 'But what a wretch I am!' Each keeps life in perspective."*(33)

How is the rich then humiliated? What James is saying is that upon being saved the wise man learns that his wealth cannot save him, it doesn't mean he has a better status in life than any of the rest of us, and because he has more materialistically, he has learned more is required of him. The rich person, the person that enjoys the invites to social dinner engagements, the person that was able to afford public entertainment, that person who could afford more than one tunic at a time, that could hire day labor to help in their business, that was able to acquire food for rainy days, to obtain credit when others could not, he has learned a lesson through humiliation. They have learned that all they have, that status, does not make them any different than anyone else, it made them no more important, it cheapened their worldly view on themselves.

Perhaps that is why Jesus taught us it was so hard for a rich man to be saved; they must forgo the idea of riches and what it brings. When you come to God you have to be ok with the idea that the way the world views you is over, and the ownership you thought you had of your life is over, and if God requires all you have you must surrender it. Just as Jesus straight up asked that young man to do, to sell all his possessions and follow Him, [Matthew 19:16-30](#); [Mark 10:17-31](#); [Luke 18:18-30](#), it was a lesson of humility, what must happen in a person's heart to follow God when you have a lot to lose. The glorious thing though is the Gospel, that Jesus gives in each account of that story, *with man it is impossible to be saved or save himself, but with God all things are possible!* God can change the rich man's heart, God can change the heart of the evangelical west, and when it happens, we need to boast in the humiliation we have learned which should be exemplified now in how we



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treat our riches and resources. Status comes not in who we think we are nor in what we have but our status comes from God alone and the path is paved with lessons of humility.

Now to help his family James gives a brief explanation of why neither should the lowly desire riches and why the rich should not try to keep up with the Joneses.

3. Understanding the Fading Glory of an Earthly Life.

^{10b} because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹ For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

So, the rich man, again remembering we are speaking to the lowly and the rich brothers, both types need to heed this lesson, every person on earth will pass away. Riches have nothing to do with life and its' length and neither does being lowly, God has set an appointed time for all men to die.

Psalm 139:16 ESV

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

The image that James is pointing out here I think is important to note. James, being in the church in Jerusalem is talking about the image of every spring when it begins to warm again, the grass on the hills on the outside of Jerusalem green up and sprout wildflowers everywhere. Then at the beginning of summer at some point, they get something called the "[Sirocco](#)" breeze. The wind comes in from the south/southeast to bring heat and sand from the desert, turning the skies yellow. It just so happens that in the span of one day the heat in Jerusalem can jump from the average of 79° in May to 104° in the space of a few hours. All in a matter of hours the grass withers, the flower dies, and the beauty of that spring perishes. James says this is the story of the rich man and his pursuits. What he has been busy doing, whether busy about increasing wealth or building bigger barns, he and all he has



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acquired has perished, he cannot withstand the will of God, and the time allotted to him.

The glory of man will always die away but the glory that God gives will outlast our short times on earth. What God exalts man with, the gift of an eternal life, man gives glory to that fact now, and in exchange he enjoys the benefits of it when his time comes. The part we need to heed family is to understand that trials will come, there will be offers to elevate your lowly state and there may even be offer of riches to lead you into a false sense of security.

But it is good here to remember the teachings of our Lord, as James has been trying to help us understand them.

Matthew 23:12 ESV

¹² Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

The Lord Jesus has come so we too may know the riches of His home, His father, and our eternal citizenship that is waiting for us. For our sake He became poor, to live a quick life like the flower in the field. He forgoes an earthly status that very easily could have given Him power and money to take the world by force. Instead, He chose the path of pain and suffering to reach future brothers and sisters, He gave His exalted life as a ransom for many, so we could see the value in His life not ours and see the strength in His standing with the Father not ours, and find security by His work not ours. My brothers and sisters please remember this today.

MP

Worldly status is fleeting and false, while the believer's true standing is found in their exaltation by God.

I pray that you face your trials of testing to turn and glorify God with a full heart of understanding His blessings.

[CALL TO OBEY]



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1. Renounce Self-Identification for Divine Identity

We are commanded to reject the worldly impulse to manufacture our own status or define our worth through personal pursuits and social standing. Instead, practice active repentance from the sin of arrogance by embracing the status God has assigned to you. Whether you currently occupy a position of worldly lowliness or abundance, recognize that your true standing is found solely in your adoption as a child of God. Boast only in Christ's work, not in any title, resource, or human achievement.

2. Cultivate a Life of Constant Humility

Whether you are the lowly brother or the wealthy brother, your call is to exhibit humility. If God has blessed you with abundance, perform a regular inventory of your heart, remembering that wealth does not grant you spiritual superiority or security. If you are in a state of earthly need, do not view this as a lack of favor from God. Use your circumstances to practice reliance on the Creator, for all brothers/sisters, regardless of their bank account, must view themselves as humble servants of the Most High.

3. Build for Eternity, Not for the Scorching Sun

Recognize that the 'glory' of this world is like the grass of the field that withers when the heat arrives. Do not invest your time, energy, and affection into the fading pursuits of this life as if they were permanent. Instead, apply your resources and focus toward the things that endure—namely, the building up of the home, the teaching of your children, and the active participation in the life of the local church. Live in such a way that your testimony points to the enduring glory of God, which alone persists when our time on earth has passed.

Prayer

[COMMUNION]

Corinthians 11:23-26 ESV



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²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

When we partake of the bread today remember the life of Jesus lived perfect for us. He who came to earth in the lowly status of a servant embraced His life of servitude, without regret. When we have tried to elevate our status to gain the praise of others, the Lord practiced humility for the praise of the Father. It is His selfless work in our Salvation that has earned the exaltation of the Father, and it is that exaltation He shares with us freely. Praise be to our Lord Jesus who has become for us someone worthy to boast in.

When we partake of the juice, we remember the blood of Jesus that was poured out for our sins. His work of humiliation on a cross, he who had all the riches of heaven, poured out His right to be praised. Instead, He poured out His precious blood as a sacrifice for sinners to spare us the humiliation of the cross. All praise to our Savior who has made a way for us through His steadfast love securing for us steadfast love, justice, and righteousness.

[CONFESSION OF FAITH]

*** The Congregation will stand and recites:**

Elder – "Christians, what do you believe?"

1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 32 "Of the Last Judgment" Paragraph 1 The Day of Judgment

God has appointed a day when he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ. 1 Jesus is given all power and judgment by the Father. On this day, not only will the apostate angels be judged, 2 but all people who have ever lived on the earth will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give



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an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds. They will receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil. 3

1. Acts 17:31; John 5:22, 27

2. 1 Corinthians 6:3; Jude 6

3. 2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:10, 12;
Matthew 25:32-46

[OFFERING+LAST SONG]

[BENEDICTION]

Go in the name of the Father, who grants us a new identity as adopted sons and daughters forever exalted to the status of heirs.

Go in the name of the Son, who has won for us by His work the status of justified, forever redeemed by our selfless Lord.

Go in the name of and power of the HS, who constantly reminds us of the fading glory of this world, and who seals our status of redemption, now go and share this good news with those who could use a new identity.



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[FELLOWSHIP CONVERSATIONS]

1. On True Identity vs. Worldly Self-Identification

How has realizing that your identity is fixed and determined by God's claim on your soul freed you from the pressure to perform or compete with the world?

2. On Boasting in Christ Alone

James gives us such a vital command to 'boast in our exaltation,' yet warns us against the arrogance of boasting in our own works. Can you share a time recently when you were tempted to find your security in your own status or abilities, and how you were able to redirect that pride back toward the grace of God instead?

3. On the Spiritual Dangers of Prosperity

As we live in a relatively prosperous society, how do you personally maintain a posture of 'holy poverty'—that is, keeping your heart detached from material security and ensuring that your riches do not become a distraction from total reliance on the Father?

4. On Encouragement in Times of Lowliness

"It is easy to feel forgotten when we occupy a lowly status in the world's eyes, but James calls that position a potential blessing. If you are currently in a season of hardship or lowliness, how can we as your church family better encourage you to see that your standing in Christ makes you 'Kingdom rich' regardless of your earthly circumstances?"

5. On Preparing for the 'Scorching Heat'

The image of the Sirocco breeze and the fading flower is a sober reminder that all our pursuits here are temporary. How does this perspective change the way you prioritize your week—specifically in terms of how you lead your home, train your children, and serve the church? What is one thing we can stop 'pursuing' this week so we can better focus on what lasts for eternity?



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