

Slide 1

Is Your Life A Paradox?

JAMES 1:9-11

Introduction

1. The Bible contains many paradoxes. What are paradoxes?

Slide 2

2. Merriam-webster defines a paradox as "a statement or sentiment that is seemingly contradictory or opposed to common sense and yet is perhaps true.

Slide 3

3. For example:

- a. You must lose your life in order to find it.

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25, NASB95)

- b. The weak are strong.

"Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:10, NASB95)

Slide 4

- c. The persecuted are blessed.

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:10, NASB95)

- d. The slave is free and the free man is a slave.

"For he who was called in the Lord while a slave, is the Lord's freedman; likewise he who was called while free, is Christ's slave." (1 Corinthians 7:22,

NASB95)

Slide 5

- e. The last will be first.

“So the last shall be first, and the first last.” (Matthew 20:16, NASB95)

- f. To be great you must serve.

“It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,” (Matthew 20:26, NASB95)

- 4. Tonight, I would like for us to look at two paradoxes that James presents to his readers which focus upon where their emphasis should be
- 5. These two paradoxes are found in vss. 9 & 10 of James chapter 1.
- 6. As we look at them I believe we will find those areas of our lives in which we are called to be paradoxical.

Slide 6

I. The Brother of Humble Circumstances

“But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position;”
(James 1:9, NASB95)

“Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation” (James 1:9, ESV)

A. WHO IS THIS BROTHER?

- 1. The people to whom James directed his letter, according to James 1:1, were “the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad.”
- 2. These were those Jewish Christians who had been driven out of their homeland, perhaps by the persecution of the church which arose after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1).
- 3. They were poor because of their faith in Christ.
- 4. Not only were they economically poor, they were socially low because they were looked down upon by those Jews who saw them as having abandoned the Law.

5. No doubt this had a psychological effect upon them as well, which resulted in a lowliness of mind.

Slide 7**B. WHAT DOES JAMES TELL THEM TO DO?**

1. They are to “glory” in their “high position,” to “boast” in their “exaltation.”
2. Why? Because they are part of God’s family, they are God’s children.
3. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, the apostle Paul wrote, “you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God” (Galatians 4:7).

Slide 8

4. To the saints in Rome he said, “The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17a, NASB95)
5. Not only were they in fellowship with God and his people, but also the angels of heaven (Hebrews 12:22-24a).

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant . . .” (Hebrews 12:22–24a, NASB95)

6. And, as we saw from our Scripture reading this morning, Peter wrote, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession . . .” (1 Peter 2:9a, NASB95)

Slide 9**C. HOW IS THIS STATUS POSSIBLE?**

1. It is made possible, first of all, because their economic poverty has produced in them a lowliness of mind which keeps them open to God.

2. Luke's first recorded words of Jesus after He began His public ministry are a quote from the prophet Isaiah 61:1:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor" (Luke 4:18a).

3. Mary's response to God's having chosen her to bear His Son, is seen in the song which she sang after Elizabeth's greeting:

"My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant" (Luke 1:46-48a, NASB95).

4. Matthew records the first Beatitude as "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).
5. James saw the poor brethren in the church as being spiritually advantaged.

Slide 10

D. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

1. We live in a world that equates prosperity with happiness and God's blessing.
2. This same mindset considers humble circumstances to be evidence of God's displeasure and thus misery on our part.
3. When you find yourself struggling through hard times, you are tempted to doubt.
4. It is very unlikely that any of us who at one time or another were oppressed either economically or socially did not doubt our standing before God.
5. You and I are imperfect beings who, who are trying every day to live out our faith. We will have doubts.
6. But to us James says, "take pride in your high position" (NIV84).

Slide 11

II. The Rich Man

“and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like a flower he will pass away” (James 1:10, NASB95).

“and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away” (James 1:10, ESV).

A. WHO IS THIS?

1. We often think of the rich as those with more privileges than we can imagine.
2. However, Jesus taught His followers that they were actually underprivileged, spiritually speaking.
3. On one occasion there was a rich young man (Matthew 19:20) who came to Jesus and asked Him what he must do to inherit eternal life (Mark 10:17).
4. At first, Jesus told him to keep the commandments — “Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother” (Mark 10:19).
5. He told Jesus, “Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up” (Mark 10:20).
6. Mark tells us that “Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”” (Mark 10:21).
7. It is here that we read “he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property” (Mark 10:22).

Slide 12

8. Jesus then said to His disciples, “Children, how hard it is 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 the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:24-25).

9. The "rich man" is that person, man or woman, whose trust is in their wealth.
10. Jesus said that it is impossible for such a person to get into heaven.

Slide 13

B. WAS THIS A PROBLEM FOR THE CHRISTIANS OF JAMES' DAY?

1. Yes. Material wealth causes a person to focus his or her attention on things.
2. In his Parable of the Sower, Jesus compared the seed sown among the thorns to "the deceitfulness of wealth" which "choke the word" so that "it becomes unfruitful" (Matthew 13:22).
3. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "You cannot serve God and wealth (money)" (Matthew 6:24).
4. In Revelation 3:17, the Lord warned the saints at Laodicea about their contentment with material wealth, "you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked," (Revelation 3:17, NASB95)

Slide 14

5. Paul's instruction to Timothy for the Christians in Ephesus was "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." (1 Timothy 6:17, NASB95)
6. What we see throughout the New Testament is that material wealth tends to be a spiritual liability rather than an asset.

Slide 15

C. WHAT DOES JAMES CALL UPON US TO DO?

“and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like a flower he will pass away” (James 1:10, NASB95).

1. Because of this, James wrote “the rich man is to glory in his humiliation” (v. 10).
2. What is this “humiliation” in which the rich man is to glory?
3. It is the fact that his wealth and his status are transitory.

Slide 16

4. To make his point he goes back to the prophet Isaiah who wrote,

“A voice says, “Call out.”

Then he answered, “What shall I call out?”

All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

When the breath of the Lord blows upon it;

Surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

But the word of our God stands forever.”

(Isaiah 40:6–8, NASB95)

5. The difference between Isaiah’s prophecy and James’ statement here is that James changes the ending so as to say,

Slide 17

“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.” (James 1:11, NASB95)

6. The NIV84 translates this last part of verse 11 as, “In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.”

Slide 18

7. Another passage for us to consider includes two verses from Psalm 49.

“Do not be afraid when a man becomes rich,
When the glory of his house is increased;
For when he dies he will carry nothing away;
His glory will not descend after him.”

(Psalm 49:16–17, NASB95)

Conclusion

1. What heavenly wisdom are we to take from these verses here in James’ letter?
2. As James addresses these Jewish Christians, some who are poor (v. 9), others who are rich (v. 10), he calls upon each of them to find their ultimate significance in their spiritual identity.
3. To the poor Christian who is tempted to feel insignificant and powerless because the world judges him or her on the basis of money and status, James says, take pride in the fact that in the spiritual realm you are seated in the heavenlies with Jesus Christ Himself.
4. To the Christian who is materially wealthy, he says, do not think too much of yourself because the world holds you in high esteem.
 - a. Do not boast in your money or your social position, because these things will soon fade away and be gone forever.
 - b. Focus instead on the fact that you identify with one who was ultimately “despised and rejected by men” (Isaiah 53:3a, ESV).
5. The point of what James has said here is this — you and I as Christians must always evaluate ourselves by spiritual not material standards.
6. This perspective is essential if we are to be the “countercultural” society that Jesus calls us to be.
7. What is Jesus’ assessment of your life tonight? Does He see a life that honors Him?