

James 1:9-11

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Verses 9-10a: “Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted. But the rich, in that he is made low...” Notice there are two opposite extremes in regard to one’s status in life — the one acquainted with poverty, and the one acquainted with riches. For most Americans, the majority of our lives are spent somewhere in between these two extremes. But throughout most of human history, this has not been the case: One was/is either rich, or he was/is poor!

But ... riches do not matter at the end of life! All the wealth that a man can amass will only be split between his relatives when he dies. Likewise, all the pains accumulated by a life of poverty will soon be absorbed by the grave. Death is an “equal opportunity employer!” (See Heb. 9:27; Rom. 5:12; Rom. 6:23; Ecc. 3:20).

With the realization of such, the poor man can rejoice knowing that he will be exalted to a position of great spiritual riches when he gains his heavenly reward. One can easily see the desirableness of such, but the next thought is more difficult — “but the rich, in that he is made low.” How many rich people (in this life) could honestly say that they look forward to the day when they will be brought low in the next; that is, they will be brought down to an equal playing field in that they will receive the same reward as those who were poor?! Perhaps this is one of the reasons that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to go to heaven (Matt. 19:24)?

Regardless, the Bible is plain that there is no respect of persons with God (Acts 10:34), and that we are all one in Christ, with no “bonus points” awarded for earthly riches or prestige (See Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). And why is this so? See the following.

Verses 10b-11: “...Because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.” In short, our lives are transient (also described as a vapor, James 4:14); thus, the sooner we learn that, the better! How many people through the years have lived half, three-fourths, or even ALL of their lives seeking fulfillment in all the wrong things? Solomon did so through much of his life. And the book of Ecclesiastes, I believe, is his letter of regret, wishing he could have all of that time back! How many people today, when they reach the end of their lives, will, like Solomon, finally admit that such pursuits are nothing but “**VANITY OF VANITIES** (or “emptiness of emptiness,” TCG) saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; **ALL** is vanity” (Ecc. 1:2, emphasis mine, TCG)?

Not only does Solomon begin his inspired “memoir” with that thought, but he ends it that way as well: “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity” (Ecc. 12:8). But lucky for us, Solomon also concludes with how to avoid such emptiness at the end of our lives: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Ecc. 12:13-14). The sooner in life one finds this out, the better!