

The Complete Christian Understands Poverty and Prosperity

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[0:00] Attached to that roughly is on Wednesday, we will study the scriptures again and we're looking at the topic of sin, habitual sin. We're not just saying don't sin, but why we sin, how we get into the habit of sin and how we can break that habit and how we can help others who are struggling in maybe a particular area to understand why we sin in such a way.

The Bible tells us to flee sin, so we're looking at how good we are at running and whether we are good at fleeing sin or whether sin so easily ensnares us and it's something we need to take seriously and I don't think as Christians we take seriously the problem of sin and we'll link that briefly to grief and to old age and things that we were looking at earlier, so we'll look at that this Wednesday.

But let's read together from James chapter 1. The passage we're looking at is from verse 9 to 12. But once again, let's put it in its context. So let's read from verse 1.

James, this is the brother of Jesus, the half-brother of Jesus, who's the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He knows the churches well and he writes, James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

[1:25] Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. In verse 9, Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position, but the rich should take pride in their humiliation, since they will pass away like a wild flower.

For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant, its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial, because having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

[2:44] We'll end our reading at the end of verse 12. Let's come before God in prayer. Let's ask for his help. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for the service this morning. We thank you for the songs that we've been singing, for the prayers that we have offered.

Lord, and Father, once again, we come to this part in the service where you speak to us. And Father, we pray, Lord, that your word would come to us clearly. Pray, Father, for the ministry of the Holy Spirit at this point, Lord, to take the things of God, the things of Christ, and apply them to our hearts and to our minds.

Give us ears to hear what you would be saying to us. And Father, we gather as a congregation, and yet we gather as individuals, different from each other, different in our own walk and experience with you.

So, Father, wherever we are, Lord, in our pilgrimage with you, we pray, Lord, that we might be better disciples. So, Father, if there's anything, Lord, that we should be thinking and doing, Lord, we pray that by your great grace, that you would put your finger upon those things and give us the grace that we need and the strength we need, Lord, to be those better disciples.

Speak to us now from your word, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Here is a sad truth, and in many ways a sad saying, and it's this, money makes the world go round.

[4:01] And money governs us in everything that we do. I came across this other image, apart from this one, money makes the world go round. If you put up the other image, Tim, I am a piece of paper, and I control your entire life.

I think if you look at your life and you look at the impact that money has on the world, on society, on people, and even on your own life, if we've got loads of money, we're happy.

If we've got plenty of money, we are content. And yet we live in a day and generation where we are very materialistic. We need money to make our life go round, and we don't have enough parts of our life begin to grind to a halt.

And money is such an important thing. And I remember moving back to Scotland and seeing the wee islands after living in London. And everywhere outside of London is a village, as far as I'm concerned.

It really is quite small. London is just so vast and so much happening. And I thought, I'd just love to live on a wee island with my wee croft and a wee post office.

[5:10] And that is all. You don't have to worry about designer labels and what car you drive. Just your wee world and your wee road or whatever. And I thought, how life would be so much easier.

Yet when you live in a city and you live with other Christians even who have things, you want those things as well. It is a real struggle and a real problem for us.

And that's what we're looking at today. Understanding poverty and prosperity as we continue this new series that will be done in the book of James.

You remember James' writing about Christian maturity. If we profess to be Christians and he wants us to be complete and mature and we should never be content that we are saved, but that we are morally upright, that we live a life worthy of the gospel.

Verse 4 is really the verse that sets the heading for us. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

[6:14] That's James' desire, that you are a complete Christian and you don't lack anything in terms of spiritual maturity. His theology behind this is verse 18. I'll mention this to you again.

It's such an important verse. He chose to give us birth. The Lord chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

It's worth memorizing that verse. That is who you are as a Christian, God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works. So this is God's desire, that you're a new creature, you're like this wee plant, and you start off as a wee seed and you grow.

And some of us have been on the Christian pathway for a while, and it's hope that we grow and that we are more mature, more complete than we were in the past.

As a result, we should think and act differently. And we saw this right at the very start, that the Christian understands trials.

[7:14] If you're a Christian here, you don't just look at bad things happening to you the way the world does. Well, it's fate, it's just I'm going through a bad time. You know that God's hand is upon you.

He's leading, he's guiding, he's molding, he's shaping you to be more obedient. He's putting you through the trials that many folk go through as well. And these things are there to perfect us, to cause us to keep pressing on, to persevere.

Nothing happens to us by accident. God is doing so many things in our life, and we might be aware of about three of them. He is working, he's molding us and shaping us.

His eye is always towards us. He never stops loving us, caring for us. And we know this when it comes to trials. We don't just look at how trials affect us in the here and now.

We can see past them. And the mature Christian knows this, and that's what James has dealt with. And then last week we looked at, well, it's one thing to have that theology, it's another thing to have it in practice.

[8:16] How do we cope with those trials? How do we think right? How do we act right? And James anticipates this, so he says, ask for wisdom. Come and ask God, Lord, how am I to respond to this particular situation, this trial, this temptation that I'm in?

I'm struggling to consider it pure joy, if I'm honest, Lord. Give me wisdom to understand and to know. And that's very practical advice that James gives us, and we looked at that last week. Now James, continuing on the same theme of trials and difficulties, talks about this whole area of poverty and prosperity.

He mentions this specific trial from verse 9 through to 12. And he mentions this because he began his letter, he mentions that these Christians, these maybe Jewish Christians, who have been scattered throughout the world, the New Jerusalem, the church, as it were, through persecution. They've had to leave their goods, a bit like Ukraine or whatever. They've had to flee their country. Gaza houses being destroyed and so forth. People really in hard times.

[9:31] And they have lost so much, and they've been scattered from their homeland, as it were. And James comes to them and mentions this area particularly, this area of, Lord, I've lost everything in financial terms.

I'm destitute. And Kent Hughes, in his commentary, says this, Because they were economically low, they were low in the eyes of the world. And no doubt, in most circumstances, low in their own eyes. Their poverty produced a lowliness of mind. You know yourself, if you're struggling and everybody else is financially doing okay, but you're struggling financially, this makes you low in your own eyes. Money, as it says, makes the world go around. And people are impressed by money. If somebody drove up here in a Rolls Royce or a Porsche or whatever and came in dressed to the nines, well, look at this in a few weeks' time, you would think, here's somebody important.

They must be something. They must be clever. They've got money. Let's make sure they have a good experience with us and so forth. It's the way we're wired. And this is, they don't have this.

[10:44] And they know that their self-esteem and everything is tied in with this. The situation is difficult for them. It's difficult when you don't have money.

And it's difficult when you see Christians and they seem to be doing okay financially, but you're struggling. You feel unequal. And maybe God is blessing them but not blessing you.

And all these things begin to come to the forefront as well. I mean, James has mentioned here, money, and that's really what we're looking at, poverty, riches and poverty.

But really, you could apply this at any level, whether it's marriage or singleness. If only I was married, if only I had other things. It might be health and unhealthy.

It might be just anything, having a better job, looking at what others have and you don't have it and your joy is dependent on this.

[11:41] So you can apply this to any level. But James is applying it to both to poverty and to riches. And his illustration here that James mentions, he really wants the poor, the poor Christian and the rich, to consider their position now and to have an eternal perspective.

They're only living in the here and now. And James wants them to lift their eyes and to see past the here and now. And really, that's what he's looking at just now. So first of all then, we'll look at, I've only got two points, dividing the passage into two.

The complete Christian understands, if you're a mature Christian here this morning, you, if you're thinking right, will have a good view of prosperity and of poverty.

You will see both of them with wisdom. That's why he's following on from wisdom. He's given this as an illustration in many ways, a very practical one for them. But the first one is this then, understanding riches.

The mature Christian will understand riches. And right away, once again, if verse 2 was considered it pure joy when you fall into various trials, that was a bombshell.

[12:54] It does it again in verse 9. Believers in humble circumstances, those who are not wealthy, they're just humble circumstances, ought to take pride in their high position.

I mean, that beggar's belief, just a statement like that, you go to somebody that's poor, you ought to take pride in your high position, you say to somebody who's struggling. It's pretty brave to walk up to somebody and to say that, James mentions this.

This is a big, big topic for James. He'll mention the rich and the poor throughout his letter. But before he expands on that verse in verse 9, he now deals with the rich.

And he talks about the rich being in a very precarious position. and I think mostly he's thinking here of the unconverted rich, just a general rich man.

They're not a Christian, but they've heaped up wealth for themselves. And basically, he tells them that they're in a precarious, their riches are precarious, they're in it, it's perishing.

[14:00] And that is the thing about some people who are rich. The riches make them feel secure. Safe as houses, like money in the bank, sayings go.

They offer security, a secure investment. But James is saying that even the richest, your wealth is impoverished. It's very weak, it's very frail.

Look at the words he uses in verse 10. James is great for using illustrations. The rich should take pride in their humiliation. Since they will pass away like a wild flower, and then the sun rises with scorching heat, it withers the plant, its blossom falls, and its beauty is destroyed.

In the same way, the rich will fade away, even while they go about their business. In other words, he's saying for the unbelieving rich, both they and the riches will perish.

They are living only for this life. This life is but a vapor. Our bodies are weak and frail, we do not last forever, and as we fail, so does everything that we build for ourselves.

[15:09] whereas the rich Christian needs to acknowledge that the wealth that they have is only in this life, and to acknowledge that that is all that is, that that wealth will sometimes be passed away or be handed over to someone else.

And James will mention this aspect at the end of his letter. If you want to turn to James 5, verse 1, Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.

Your wealth has rotted and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.

You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look, the wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

Verse 5, You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourself for the day of slaughter. Well, that's a statement.

[16:14] You have fattened yourself for the day of slaughter. In other words, you have just made yourself worse. You have lived in luxury and self-indulgence. This obviously isn't speaking, hopefully not, of a Christian whose life is geared towards pleasing the Lord.

We see the futility of just heaping up riches. And that's a big topic. And James will turn to this in chapter 2 about favoritism. Jesus taught the same thing.

In Luke 12, verse 15, he tells a parable. But before he tells the parable, he says this, Then he said to them, Watch out. Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.

Life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. I think that's a staggering statement. And I'm sure that I, and probably you, don't really hold to that.

We really think that our life is the abundance of possessions. And the more we have, the happier we are. If only our kitchen was better, and our car was better, our clothes were better.

[17:20] And we run after these things, and we think, once I have these things, I'll be content. And we, life, certainly for the man in the street, the abundance of your possessions is life.

People strive after these things. And Jesus says, Your life is not about the things that you, the abundance of your possessions. So he tells this parable in verse 16 of Luke 12.

The ground of a certain man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. Then he says, This is what I'll do. I'll tear down my barns, build bigger ones, and then I will store my surplus again.

I'll say to myself, You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, You fool, this very night your life will be demanded from you.

Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves, but is not rich towards God.

[18:25] That is the thing. The Bible never teaches against riches. It never says riches is wrong. Solomon was wealthy. David was wealthy. Job was wealthy.

Abraham was wealthy. All these people were wealthy. The problem is that wealth can sometimes drag us away from God.

and it is that that we might be Christians, but we can be storing up things but not rich towards God. It can, it's not so much money, but the love of money.

1 Timothy 6, Peter says, Paul says, 1 Timothy 6, 9, Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith. Now, Paul is talking about Christians here who are happy to be saved but still wanted money.

[19:33] They have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. We lived in an affluent area of North London, East Finchley, and just the efforts that people had to go to to maintain their wealth.

They would be up early in the morning. You'd see them walking past at 6 o'clock and then 7 o'clock in the morning and coming back about 9 o'clock at night. They're working 14, 15 hours a day. It's just crazy the amount of work that they put in just trying to maintain. And I used to say, when did these folk actually get the chance to enjoy what they earn?

and you never see them in their gardens sitting saying, look at all this, this is great. They're just working, working, working. And it can do that and Christians can do this.

We live in a very materialistic culture. We like our creature comforts, our luxuries, our cars, our furniture, our designer labels. I must confess, whenever I come back to Scotland I feel materialistic and I hate it.

[20:38] I just hate it. I see designer labels aplenty. They're everywhere. I think I said to you before, our girls, they used to go to Musselburgh Gramma, Louis Vuitton handbags and everything.

Everybody has to have a label, has to have a brand, has to have a wee crest. But like that in Scotland, we're very shallow. They were called, my daughter was called a label slag for wearing. She went to Matlock, school in Matlock and they never wore. They didn't have to wear a uniform, they wore whatever they wanted, but none of them wore designer labels. And she came in with a super dry thing on or something like that and they called her a label slag.

But it was funny, in Derbyshire and we had folk of all different incomes that no time did ever envy. Look at what they have got. Oh, he's wearing that brand. It just never happened.

And it never happened in London. Even though these folk were very wealthy round about us, they didn't do in quite a showy way. And then when I come back to Scotland, and I wonder why that is. I've tried to figure out why that is.

[21:42] And I think it's to do with the weather, believe it or not. I think it's just to do with the weather. There's nothing better, there's nothing more to do. In London when it's sunny, you can go to Regent's Park or Hyde Park and just spend time in Derbyshire, spending, weather's mild, you can take your kids out and you can show them the birds and they're all knowledgeable plants and birds that mums and dads do this with their kids.

Train spotting, wow, wish I had a pound for every train spotter I met. Whereas you come to Scotland, the weather's miserable, you know, it's like you're on holiday, you go to the cinema, restaurants, you just spend, you go to shopping centres, you wake up on a Saturday, what are we going to do?

If we can forget Holyrood Park's miserable, let's go to Fort Kinnear. And that's all we do. I don't think we're more materialistic than them, it's just, I just find it sad.

And I'm in the same trap myself. If I'm given, I remember speaking to a Christian, a young man not that long ago, and he was saying, John, the Lord's really convicted me, I'm not going to wear designer stuff, I'm fed up wearing Nike, this, that and the other, has to be this.

And that was the way, and I remember thinking, that is great. I remember thinking, I won't last long, but that is great, just a breath of fresh air, I'm not going to be a label slag or whatever.

[23:02] I'm going to be this person, although I did laugh when he says, the only thing I draw a line is, I don't want to wear shoes out of Matalan, he said. If that's you, if you're wearing shoes out of Matalan, I apologise on his behalf.

But anyway, that's what he said. And there are things, even for ourselves, I would do this, and I don't mind that, but as long as I have this. And our mind can be so much attached to this world. Materialistic, and people are impressed by wealth, even Christians, we are impressed, if somebody has money, we immediately pigeon them whole, and they're obviously gifted, they're impressive, look at what they have done, life is successful because of the car they're driving, the clothes that they wear.

And as Christians, we don't voice it, but we are impressed by these things. And James is saying it's wrong. The magnetism of riches is powerful, and Paul says this, but it leads us away, leads us away from the Lord.

Solomon learned the futility of running after things. He had everything. He had wives, projects, policies, he had it all. In Ecclesiastes, if you ever want to just bring yourself back down to a bump, read the book of Ecclesiastes.

[24:18] Ecclesiastes 2.11, when I surveyed all that my hands had done and all the toil to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind, and nothing was gained under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 4. And I saw that all toil, all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2.21, for a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge, and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it.

This too is meaningless and misfortune. When a person becomes a Christian, we should see through this more than we do. We should seek treasure that's in heaven.

If you were here last Sunday night, we finished the book of Philippians by looking at how Paul praised this church who supported him in ministry, who gave to him, and we asked a question last Sunday night, for those of you who weren't here, how much should we give?

[25:25] And we said that we should give until it matters, until it matters to us, until we need to deny yourself certain things. That is why Paul called their giving a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Our giving to the Lord's work, our way in which we heap up treasure in heaven, is when we offer our giving as a sacrifice. And we said that, is it 10% you give?

There's no biblical, clear biblical command for 10%, a tithe. We looked in the Old Testament, it's a law, it's a civil law as well as religious law. I often give that as a good guide.

We always try and give 10%. But for some it might be 2%, because that's hard for you even to give the 2%. For others, as I said last, it might be 75%.

It might be an awful lot more. But you give until it matters to you. And as long as we're heaping up other things and waiting until it's comfortable, we need to determine how much we give.

[26:31] Before we spend things on ourselves, Jesus was impressed at this, and we mentioned the widow who put two coins in. He said she gave more than the rest because she gave all she had to live on.

It mattered to her the amount that she gave. I wonder if we are giving, the amount that we are giving, does it matter, does it matter to us? Because this is how we build up treasure in heaven. We put the Lord's ministry first. The unconverted have no desire to do these things. They give nothing to the Lord. They are not interested.

They are not rich towards God. They do not serve him or whatever. But believers who are rich, we need to remember that the riches in this life are fleeting, passing away.

But are we good stewards of all that the Lord has given us? I want to end this section with Paul's words, 1 Timothy 6. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, not to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

[27:40] God's not against giving you things for your enjoyment, but it's how we deal with them. Paul in that chapter says, command them to do good and to be rich in good deeds and to be generous and willing to share.

In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Paul's basically saying to the rich Christians, don't just use it for yourself. Yes, enjoy it, but give it away for the Lord's work. Give it away. Do good. Help others in this way you heap up treasure in heaven.

Does that make sense? That is how we are to consider riches. But James Hart in this passage here is really with the poor. That is very much the thrust.

Those who are struggling. So secondly, and finally, we'll finish with understanding the crown of life. He wants to encourage them. He doesn't just say, verse 9, take pride in your high position.

[28:47] He now begins, in verse, as you go down later on in this, to explain in verse 12, just this one verse, how you can take pride in your high position.

So he's speaking to believers here, people who are different, people with a new heart, new creatures, a new agenda, who want to live to please God, who have been chosen by God through the word, new birth.

And such people, if you're a Christian, you understand sin in the world, its deceitfulness, its temptation, the shallowness of materialism, and you try to live a life for heaven.

Not for the here and now. Now you recognize this, I'm sure if you're a Christian, I've not said anything you disagree with. You say, yes, you're right, Pastor, we can't take it with us. We shouldn't be heaping up wealth.

As somebody said, nobody's going to have in their gravestone. I wish I spent more time in the office. At that time, you'll wish you'd maybe served the Lord more.

[29:51] You'd done more for the Lord. These good deeds follow us to heaven. And I know I wrestle with this. As I'm coming to the end of my working life, I don't know when that will be.

And you're pensioning, you hope that that's enough. And I think, if only I'd stayed in electronics. A lot of my mates are in electronics, and they're living the dream, as it were. And I think, boy, they've laid up stuff for them, they're not anxious.

And then I keep telling myself, if I'm going to flatline, I'll think, at that point, I'm glad I was a pastor. I'm glad I gave. Not because I'm worth more than anything, but I served the Lord.

And I'm sure you will look back to those times, you say, Lord, there were times I handled the wealth well that you gave me. I didn't hoard it. I didn't do this. I used these things. I used my life to serve you.

And James is wanting these Christians to look at their life and to really store up treasure, to see, have an eternal perspective.

[30:52] These Christians would have heard, perhaps, Jesus' words, or been taught them when Jesus said in Matthew 6, great sermon on the mount, Jesus himself says, do not store up for yourself treasure on earth where moth and vermin destroy, where thieves break in and steal, but store up for yourself treasure in heaven.

Jesus tells us specifically to do this. Store up for yourself treasures in heaven where moth and vermin do not destroy, where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

James is saying, your heart is not here. Don't desire wealth. Place your heart in heaven. So James wants to encourage them to have an undivided heart, a heart that is given over to God.

He'd already mentioned about being double-minded, and he's wanting them to be single-minded in this area. So what does it mean to be a mature, complete Christian under this heading, striving towards the crown of life?

First of all, they persevere under trial. Blessed, verse 12, is the one who perseveres under trial. The Christian life is one of perseverance.

[32:05] Maybe you're here this morning and you're thinking, pastor, you don't know my bank balance. I'd love to swap with a rich man. I'm really struggling. If I'm honest, I'd just love to live in their shoes.

I remember somebody saying that. I know money can't bring happiness, but I'd love the opportunity to discover it. And maybe that's you. You're saying, if only I had more money, I'm discontent. And it might be, for you, a time of persevering under trial in this area. It might be something else that you want, a different lifestyle, maybe marriage, whatever, and you think, if only I had that, I would be more content.

These principles apply. We persevere. Hebrews 10. Remember those early days after you received the light, when you endured a great conflict full of suffering.

Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult, persecution. At other times, you stood side by side by those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property.

[33:06] Because you knew that you yourselves had a better and lasting possession. So do not throw away your confidence. It will be richly rewarded.

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. What great promises this is. That not running after, they have this, Lord, I want this. There was a time for us to persevere. And there were a time when we've known plenty and we've known, Paul said this, new plenty, new poverty.

This world is vanity fair. And we need to, like pilgrim, put our fingers in our ears and march through it. We are so impressed by this, that, and the other.

So how do we, what is this person? This person is someone who perseveres. It's also somebody who knows the Lord, who loves the Lord. Look at the very last verse that you could easily miss in verse 12.

[34:06] He has promised this to those who love him. Is that not your greatest motivation? And if there's one antidote to being materialistic, is you love the Lord more than you love things.

Trinkets. And that is, he is our glory. Your designer label is not your glory. The badge on your car is not your glory. The house is not your glory.

Where your house is, is not your glory. It's funny when folk just ask where you stay. You love to be able to say, you stay in a nice area.

I never used to volunteer. Folk, my early days were spent in Springburn. And then when we were married, we moved to Croftfoot in the shadow of Castle Milk. So, we say we live in near Chateau Lay.

And you just, you just, you just, your pride is there, isn't it? I'm really better than I am. This is a disease that is in every one of us.

[35:09] And we don't know our heart if we don't take this seriously. It is there. But we should love the Lord more than anything. And if that is the case, then that will regulate everything else.

Thirdly, we're not only persevering, a persevering Christian and a loving Christian towards the Lord. We stand the test. Look at verse 12. Perseveres under trial, having stood the test.

What is this? The test of temptation that will face you every day of your life. A temptation for better things, a better situation, more money, more this.

And that is a test that we face every single day. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Paul says whatever happens here, compared to what awaits us, it's nothing in that comparison.

They're achieving for us our light and momentary troubles are achieving an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

[36:16] So, therefore, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

That is how we stand the test. We keep pressing on. But James wants them to look at the crown of life. That's what he, that is that the wee phrase in here that should light up for you, those three words, crown of life.

That is your high position. It is not your money. Your money is your gold and your bling do not define you. What defines you is this crown of life that Paul mentions, that James mentions here. That person who perseveres, who under trial stands the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised. Now, the crown of life, what does that mean?

The crown of life, basically, that must have meant something to the readers. And he's probably borrowing it from the sports world to have this crown, this laurel wreath that you have because you have persevered.

[37:24] Paul says the same thing, doesn't he? That life is a race. 1 Corinthians 9. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last. But we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, Paul says, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which Christ has called me heavenwards.

You are called not just for salvation, you're called to a crown. Does that not excite you? You're called to a crown, the crown of life. And it really is quite something the Lord himself will give us. It's a crown of life. The Bible talks about various crowns. Let me just read you a couple of verses. A crown of righteousness. Paul says in 2 Timothy 4, Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

A crown of righteousness. Crown of glory, Peter talks about. When the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory, which will never fade away.

[38:42] And then Revelation talks about the victor's crown. Do not be afraid of what you're about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for 10 days.

Be faithful, even to the point of death. And I will give you as you, give you your life as your victor's crown. Revelation 3, I am coming soon.

Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. That is what we strive for. Treasure in heaven.

A crown of righteousness. Crown of glory. Victor's crown. And that is why the poor Christian is in a better position than the rich non-Christian.

100%. All day, every day. We strive on towards glory. But in finishing, remember that James says, there is blessings in this life.

[39:41] Happy. Verse 12. Blessed. Happy is the one who perseveres. It's not all just doom and gloom here and joy in heaven. You can know joy and peace and blessedness while you're even struggling financially or struggling in whatever area.

Jesus himself tells us not to worry. Do not worry. Do not worry about your life, what you will lead to drink, your body, what you will wear.

Is life more, not more than food and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air. Look at the flowers of the field and so forth. Do not worry about tomorrow.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The Lord knows what you need before you ask him, he tells us. The very hairs on your head are counted. You're worth more than many sparrows.

So these things should encourage us. As Christians, we have much to rejoice in. I remember, last illustration before we finish, I remember arriving in East Finchley and I've usually ministered in quite kind of rougher areas and we just felt we were living the dream.

[40:51] It's how we described it to folk. We were in an affluent area and we'd walk up through Mussel Hill. The houses were stunning. Not so grand

that they were obscene. Ten minute walk, there was a place called Bishop's Avenue and they were obscene.

They were just bonkers, those houses. Massive big, these big Greek temples or whatever, the stairs going up and the massive pillars and fountains and Ferraris in the driveway.

And they start about 50 million, those houses and got up to about 150 million. And I remember looking at an advert where they said it was one of those type of houses.

It just looked like that. Some of them looked even more stunning than that. And the selling feature for this house, it was 48 million or something, was you had permission to demolish it and to build something else.

You were only buying the land that it was on. It's just insane. But where we were, the houses were only starting about 4 million or something upwards.

[41:51] But I remember walking up to Mussel Hill and thinking, and you walked up and as you walk up to Mussel Hill, there's a street, and every shop was a beauty salon type of thing.

And folk were going about with their poodles and wee trolleys and stuff like that. But I remember thinking, boy, these folk have really got it all. And there was a lot of me went out and thought, wouldn't it be great just to have that?

And I'm thinking. And then I read a verse at that time, and it was a verse in Psalm 4, verse 7. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.

You have put more joy in my heart than them with all their grain and their wine when it abounds.

And I thought, that is a fact. That is 100% fact that others can have grain and wine and it abounding.

But you can know more joy than them. And I remember saying, that is so true. They can keep their money and their ulcers and whatever it is. I'd rather stay in my wee potting shed and know the Lord and strive for Him.

[43:01] I can know more joy in the Lord than I can in any material thing. So may the Lord help us to understand riches and to understand the crown of life.

Let's stand and we'll sing. All I once held dear, built my... Knowing you, Jesus. Knowing you, there is no greater thing. I wonder if you can sing that and really mean that this morning.

So let's stand and we'll sing together. All I once held dear, built my life upon.

All this world reveals and lords me own. All I once held dear, built my life upon. All I once thought, gave, I have counted, Lord.

All I once thought, gave, I have counted, Lord. Spent and worthless now compared to this. Knowing you, Jesus.

[44:07] Knowing you, there is no greater thing. You're my all, you're the best.

You're my joy, my righteousness. And I love you, Lord. Now my heart's desire is to know you more. To be found in you and known as yours. To possess by faith what I could not earn.

All surpassing gift of righteousness. Knowing you, knowing you, there is no greater thing.

You're my all, you're the best. You're my joy, my righteousness. And I love you, Lord.

[45:12] Oh, to know the power of your risen life. And to know you in your sufferings. To become like you in your death, my Lord.

So with you to live and never die. Knowing you, Jesus.

Knowing you, there is no greater thing. You're my all, you're the best. You're my joy, my righteousness.

And I love you, Lord. Love you, Lord.

Amen. You sang that very well. I can encourage you to come out this evening. If you can, if you're struggling or whatever. You just want to find out about a man who comes from a dysfunctional family.

[46:13] And that includes us all. How the Lord can use us, lead us and guide us and bless us. I really commend it. Sunday evening services here are first class. We're not a great deal in terms of attendance.

We have a good number. We sing well. And I really enjoy the Sunday evening services. So if you can come out, it would be great to see you. It would be a great encouragement. Let's just close in

prayer. Our loving Heavenly Father.

Lord, we pray that our desire in closing would be, as James desired would be for us. That we would be complete. Perfect Christians. Mature Christians. Not lacking anything.

Help us, Father, in this area of our lives. Money is such a force in our world today. And if we're honest, Lord, it has such a hold in each one of us. So, Father, we pray that we would see riches for what they are.

And whatever way in which you have blessed us, we would use them, Father, to build up treasure in heaven. Help us, Father. Give us wisdom in this, we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

[47:13] Amen. Thank you, folks. programming music in Jesus' name is awandan. It's a place that 59 plus practicinginy is■ means a culture. Even for Christians, we pray like the Lord to live in the head. We will continue to live in forever. We promise our hearts to love and scour on the watch list is beginning again.

■■ ajustements with the light of the■ of the Lord... tamam. Woo! All the?, up all the party. Marian ■■■■■■ to the night, as I have hatred known and I have seen Chandler. So we ask others to live in the face from my heart. Thank you.