

James 1 9-11

I. Let the humble brother rejoice in his high position/status (9)

Obviously, this is not a contradiction. Nor is it just wishful thinking. James is referring to two different standards of judgment and two different realities. In the world's estimation, a person of low status in terms of wealth or social class has a low status in everything. However, James points out that a person of low status, if they are in Christ, is heir to the greatest kingdom imaginable. Even if that person is currently living in poverty or obscurity, they can rejoice, by faith, in the reality of their calling and status in God's eyes, and in the future, full realization of their inheritance and high status.

II. Let the wealthy brother rejoice in his low position, because his wealth is temporary (10-11)

A. [Let] the wealthy [brother rejoice] in his humble position/status (10a)

Equally obvious, this proposition is the opposite of the previous. The meaning of "rejoice/boast" is somewhat different. Rather, they are not to rejoice and put their hope in their wealth or high status. Their hope and pride is to be in those things that appear humble and of no status to the world, because the things which the world holds in high esteem are temporary. cf. 1 Tim. 6:17

It is possible for a rich person of high status to be humble in heart, and God will often humble people for their own benefit and character growth. If a person truly becomes humble, then this is a cause for rejoicing.

B. Reason: Because he and his wealth are passing away, like a wild flower (10b-11e)

cf. 4:14 on the temporary nature of human life and all its glory

cf. 5:1-6 where the punishment of the unrighteous wealthy is elaborated.

1. Because he is passing away, like a wild flower (10b-c)

The Old Testament regularly compares temporary human life to wilting grass, cf. Ps. 37:2, Isa. 40:6-8

a Because, like a flower of wild grass (10b)

b He is passing away (10c)

2. Reason: Wealth is as temporary as the beauty of a flower (11)

a As the result of the sun's heat, the grass will pass away, and its beauty fade (11a-d)

1) For the sun rose with the burning heat (11a)

2) Result: the flower of the grass dried up and perished, with its beauty (11b-d)

a) And the grass dried up (11b)

b) And its flower fell off/perished (11c)

c) And the beauty of its appearance was destroyed (11d)

b In the same way, also, the wealthy will fade away even in his business pursuits (11e)

The parallel should be obvious. Everyone sees the temporary nature of grass and flowers, because they wither in a short span of time, and we notice the rapidity of its withering.

Because human life lasts much longer than flowers, we rarely meditate on the corresponding temporary nature of human life.

But the Bible is good to regularly remind us of this reality so that we can adjust our lives taking into account the end of our lives and the coming judgment.

This is the point that James is making, that the rich should think about the coming judgment and take joy and pride only in those things that will truly last in the judgment, and not take joy and pride in those things which will ultimately disappear and disappoint.