

Text: James 1:9-11  
Target audience: Christians  
Topic: Status  
Theme: Status based on wealth  
My purpose for this message: To switch out interest from temporary status, to a status that endures  
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## Viewing Status from the Hearse

PRAY.

As some of you know, Betty's mother passed away quite unexpectedly Tuesday. I had made my preaching plan for the first 3 months of James 4 weeks ago and not knowing what this week would bring, entitled today's message *Viewing Status from the Hearse*. When we arrived at the funeral Friday afternoon, parked at the back of the church building was a long black Cadillac which had brought Mother's body from the funeral home. The windows were tinted, and drapes hung in the interior. I thought of what it must be like for the mortician to drive carrying a casket in back. It would be quiet, for one thing. For the person in the casket not only could not see or hear, he could not speak.

Let's suppose however, that the dead *could* speak from the hearse; what might they say? Certainly, *whatever* they'd say would be profound. Maybe something like *The things you think matter really don't*. They'd shake their heads at the customers wandering the Mercedes lot trying to figure out how to get one of these, on their salaries. They may cry out a warning to the salesman inflating his product's features so he can beat his manager's goals for the month and get that big bonus. Or plead with the woman marrying an ungodly man she's not enamored with, who stands to inherit dad's company.

On the other hand, the dead might also have something to say to the poor man who has maxed out his credit card trying to enjoy more of life than he can. Or who has deprived his Lord of the first fruits so he can pretend he has someone else's status. *The things you think matter really don't*. READ James 1:9-11.

Before we're done with the book of James, you will discover this Jerusalem pastor tends to be a meddler about money. Rightfully so because as Larry Burkett loved to point out, the amount of print the Bible devotes to money is greater than what it devotes to prayer. Maybe because money is the most common idol, or maybe because money is the great X-Ray of our hearts.

Some of James' teaching about money warns the rich. But this was *also* written to channel the eyesight of poor Christians. Believers who had either forgotten or were losing interest in their esteemed status as God's children. Instead they were craving status that wouldn't last.

### 1. The Poor Man

Although v.9 doesn't *specifically* say the first man is poor, it's obvious he is since he's contrasted with the rich man of v.10. This man is of "humble circumstances." What James wrote in his original text in Greek, was simply that this man is "low." His status is at—or near the bottom of the economic rung. Think, the "Untouchables" of India. 200 million people shunned because India's primary religion—Hinduism—teaches that all people are created unequal. Reincarnation means you get to live another miserable existence to atone for past sins. So, poverty's your own fault. So, the poor are mistreated by those from higher castes and it's acceptable.

While in the USA poverty is not seen as a punishment, nevertheless the *best* the poor man can often get, is pity. The *worst* he gets is disdain, disgust, and dismissed. He is considered “low,” to have a “low” position.

Except by God. *He* says the poor man actually has a “high position” that he should revel in, “boast in.” *What* “high” position? I have become increasingly fascinated by God’s preferential love for the poor. I don’t know any other way to describe it except “preferential.” It’s impossible to miss in the Bible: from Leviticus to Amos to Luke to 1 Timothy to James. God made special exceptions for the poor when it came to sacrifices (Leviticus 5:7); special arrangements for their food by telling landowners how—and how *not* to—harvest their crops (Leviticus 19:9-10). He evaluates people by how they treat the poor (Acts 10:4) There’s something about the poor. READ Luke 6:20; James 2:5.

Which helps explain God’s infatuation with these folks: He’s *picked* them. There are *pragmatic* reasons God might be partial to them:

- having *little*, they are little *controlled* by it.
- Being so needy, the poor cast themselves more readily on the Lord.

Which may explain why in inner city Brooklyn, the line for prayer meeting forms in the street 90 minutes before the doors open. Or why there are no seats for prayer meetings in places like Uganda. The *needy* are desperate for God.

But the main reason for God’s affection for the poor, is that He picked them. The high position these poor people have—all of whom are Christians—is the position of an heir to the King. READ Romans 8:17a; 1 Peter 2:9.

Christian, that’s true of you. Whatever you have—or don’t have—is not your ultimate status maker. Do you think that well-to-do people are going to go to the head of the line in heaven? Don’t you remember that Jesus said it’s not easy, but *hard* for a rich person to go to heaven. Too much in the way.

Our status is determined by our sonship, our daughtership. We’re heirs of the king. Take pride in that. That’s a high position.

My mother-in-law today is living like a princess, finally having received her full inheritance. When she was alive she lived in a comfortable one-bedroom apartment with few possessions beyond the basics. She wasn’t broke, she could have bought what she wanted. Yet she gave money away, loaned money she could have used herself. And I think since daddy died 10 years ago, she’s lived life with one foot in heaven, and it showed in her lifestyle. Grasping her high position with Jesus, the money, the stuff, didn’t matter much.

## 2. The Rich Man

Vv.10-11 James turns his attention to rich men (Christians). He doesn’t condemn the riches themselves, just the artificial status they give the rich man. When he flashes by in his red Porsche, heads swivel and fingers point.

Traffic crawls by his house. The seminary I attended north of Chicago was located near some very exclusive homes. We’d take PA friends who’d visit us, on tours: “That’s Mike Ditka’s house, that’s Mr. T’s house, that’s Phil Jackson’s, that one being built is Michael Jordan’s.” And none of us could help it; we gave those home owners a status in our minds because of their mansions. They had a “high position.” Or did they? Do they? Would the dead agree from their vantage point?

James says what the well-to-do should be proud of is not their *high* status, but their low status. What’s he mean? READ Matthew 23:12. God’s kingdom is upside-down. What He values, people don’t; what people value, God doesn’t. Although a poor man is poor to others—many of whom look down on him because of it, he isn’t

poor in God's kingdom. Although the rich man's rich to others—many of whom admire him because of his riches, he isn't rich in God's kingdom. In fact, God admonishes the rich *Christian* to voluntarily shoulder his lower status. Voluntarily take the lower position. Didn't Jesus? READ Philippians 2:8. Jesus who was infinitely rich, embraced the dignity of humility. And calls us to it.

### 3. The Common End

Can any status possibly last? No. The rich man will die as surely as the poor. To drive home his point James quotes God from Isaiah 40:6-7. *All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows on them.*

Perhaps in Palestine it was Iris, it's purple beauty unfolding to dazzle the hiker. She camps nearby for a while during the midday sun and watches sadly as the blistering heat wilts, then consumes the flower. It falls to the ground, lifeless, and no longer beautiful. So too, the rich man chasing his goals will die. For a while, he captures everyone's attention with what his money can buy. Then one day he's on his cell phone sealing a deal when he falls dead of a heart attack. *The rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.*

(*You'll Be There*) George Strait sings, "I ain't never seen a hearse with a luggage rack..." His observation's correct. No matter what we achieve or what we own, death comes to us all, and strips us of *anything* that gave us status in this life; death is the great equalizer.

In the last few days, Mother's children had to purchase an obituary, funeral services, a vault, a casket. And though a person's circumstances and position in life may guarantee that he is buried in pomp and splendor, placed in a granite mausoleum in a stunning rosewood casket with an element-proof vault, he is no less dead than the pauper who had no obituary written, whose body was cremated, who had no service done for him, and had no one to claim his ashes. Dead is dead is dead is dead. And as it steals from its victims their final breaths, so too death takes whatever status was theirs. 1 Timothy 6:7 says, "*... we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.*"

#### Concl:

Perhaps some of these Jewish Christians were envious of, angry about, their rich counterparts. Perhaps not so different from us. We wonder, "Don't I deserve what that brother or sister has? Why has God neglected to bless me, to give me the desires of my heart? James gently reminds us, "What *seems* important, isn't."

I'll conclude with Jesus' admonition from Luke 12:15: "*Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*"