Reversal of Fortunes
James 1:9-12

In this world, it's assumed that it is always better to be rich than poor, to have more rather than less. But God's kingdom operates according to a very different set of values, a set of values that are both counter-intuitive to our nature and counter-cultural in this world. James turns our typical assumptions about wealth upside down by revealing the subtle dangers of abundance and the surprising blessings of need so that we can all, regardless of income, give the Lord our undivided allegiance.

Reversal of Fortunes

• Blessed are the poor in spirit, mourners, meek, persecuted
• More blessed to give than receive
• Become first by being last
• Become a leader by being a servant
• Become great by being humble
• Become free by being a slave
• Find strength through weakness
• Find wisdom through foolishness
• Discover life through death

There is great poverty in riches
and great riches in poverty

1st Century Middle East Economies

Poor
— small land owners, tenant farmers
— day laborers and beggars
— lived hand-to-mouth

Rich
— Herodian family
— high-priestly clans
— aristocracy
— merchants
— almost all got rich by immoral gain

The Poverty of Riches

1. will not last

Do not weary yourself to gain wealth, Cease from your consideration of it. When you set your eyes on it, it is gone. For wealth certainly makes itself wings like an eagle that flies toward the heavens. —Proverbs 23:4–5

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
2. carries danger

Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me....” —Jeremiah 9:23–24

3. if gained immorally, brings judgment

- explicitly illegal means (5:4)
- legal but selfish means

Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land. —Isaiah 5:8

4. if hoarded, brings judgment

“The Bible does not condemn wealth as such; but there is no book which more strenuously insists on wealth’s responsibility and on the perils which surround those who are abundantly blessed with the world’s goods.” —William Barclay

**The Riches of Poverty**

1. a receptive heart (2:5)

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble...

...but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong...

...and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.


“How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! For 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.”

2. a position of honor (1:9)

3. an opportunity for reward (1:12)

**Application**

- Don’t trust in what you have
- Don’t lust for what you lack
- Live for what lasts

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich. —2 Corinthians 8:9