

WEEKEND Edition 20/21 August 2022 "Right Perspective" (James 1:9-12)

Hello, my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

May I ask...when was the last time you walked through a cemetery? *What was your impression as you looked at the grave markers, the dates, and the words engraved on the headstones?* Normally there's a name, a birth date and a death date and often a 'dash' between those two dates. Unless you knew the person or someone is able to tell you the story of that person, that may be all you know.... name, dates and a 'dash' representing their entire lifetime. Walking through a cemetery can be a sobering experience, can't it, particularly if it's an old cemetery and you even come across family plots with generations from the same family buried near each other?

One of the great questions in life that we all face is this... *'when my life is over, what will be the summary of my life'? What was my lifetime all about, what difference did my life make on this earth'?*

Yesterday we began a new journey in "Walking with Jesus" as we sat down with a man starting to write a letter to the Jewish Christ followers all across the Roman empire during very, very difficult times in the first century. His name is James. He grew up with Jesus, in fact Jesus was his older brother... now think about that a moment! Can you imagine what that would be like? We don't know exactly how many years separated them, but we know Mary was his mother and Joseph was his father and James had at least 5 other siblings, according to Mark's account of Jesus. (Mark 6:3)

We know this James wanted nothing to do with Jesus' claim to be Messiah, nor was he impressed with or fascinated by reports of Jesus' miracles during His years of public ministry. We don't know his attitude about Passover/Easter weekend and Jesus' arrest, trials, beatings and crucifixion. *But we do know that Jesus' resurrection proved to James that it was all true and he totally changed his mind, his heart and his attitude toward his brother Jesus.*

We presume James was on the hillside when Jesus ascended into the sky (Acts 1:9) and we know he was present with Mary his mother, when they were all gathered together, and the Holy Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 1:14) With the execution death of apostle James, the brother of apostle John, and Peter's escape from Herod's prison and flight into hiding, it appears this James became one of the primary spokesmen of the apostles in Jerusalem. He was led by the Holy Spirit of God to write his letter of encouragement about the year 48ad, and so let's return to his home and listen as he writes...

"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." (James 1:9-11)

James was writing to many Jewish Christians who had lost everything as they fled persecution in Jerusalem, and they often found life very hard as they tried to start over in new towns. Yet James urges them to **'take pride in their high position.'** What high position they might have asked? *Oh, the privileged position of being deeply loved by God the Father and adopted into God's precious family.*

In fact, the apostle Peter some years later wrote these wonderful words regarding their 'high position': **"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness and into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God!"** (1 Peter 2:9,10)

However, as these Jewish Christians looked around at their very difficult life, it would be easy for them to conclude that God had abandoned them, or that the price they were paying to follow Jesus was unreasonably too high. Therefore, James wrote these words urging them to see themselves and their situation in life as a high and holy privilege... *they were God's chosen, prized possession, His people!* While the world around them did not show them respect or praise them as valuable, God wanted them to know HE held them up high, as trophies of His grace and evidence of His mighty work. Jesus had delivered them from their sin bondage, they were forgiven of their sin, they were adopted by Holy, Almighty God as His sons and daughters, and were indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, and thus they were royalty!

My friends, if you have trusted Jesus to be your Savior, how do you view yourself? Royalty, a son or daughter of the King of kings? Or an outcast from society or someone to be mocked because of your love for and obedience to God?

Those dear Jewish Christians, all across the Roman empire, were just like you and me today. They looked at the people in their towns who were powerful and wealthy and influential and living what appeared to be very comfortable lives. *Naturally they struggled with envy and questions of why God would allow them to suffer such injustice and persecution if they really were God's chosen people, while many who had no apparent interest in Jesus or even in God were evidently successful and comfortable?*

As James wrote, I wonder if he was thinking of what the prophet Jeremiah had written several hundred years before in similar conditions: **"This is what the LORD says: 'Let not the wise person boast of their wisdom or the strong person boast of their strength or the rich person boast of their wealth, but let the person who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know ME, that I am the LORD who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth, for in these I delight.' declares the LORD."** (Jeremiah 9:23,24) Now that's an entirely different perspective on what's important and what gives a person the right to brag about accomplishments, at least from God's perspective.

Perhaps James thought of Isaiah 40 **"All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD falls on them...but the word of the LORD endures forever."** (Is. 40:6-8) Cemeteries remind us of these truths, don't they, my friends? No matter the length of our earthly sojourn, nor our accomplishments or achievements which receive public acclaim; nor where we have lived in the world; nor what our family heritage was; or what our total net worth is when we die... *we entered this world with nothing, and we leave this world empty handed!* That is reality!

Several years later, as Paul reached the end of his life and reflected on this truth, the Holy Spirit led him to write this: **"Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world and we will take nothing out of it... Those who want to get rich fall into a temptation and trap... for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."** (1 Timothy 6:6-10)

James wanted his listeners to remember this life on earth is not all there is, in fact this life is like a drop in the ocean of time and significance! Eternity is far more important and for those who have trusted in Jesus the Christ to be their Savior then eternity is exciting and inviting and gives us hope, great hope, in the here and now! Did you see James encourages his fellow Jewish Christians to rejoice in their trials, their persecution, for it will develop their faith in God and God's Promises? *And that faith gives them strength to persevere in difficult times.* James then proclaims one of those great promises: **"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!"** (James 1:12)

Oh my, the power of looking forward to the time a follower of Jesus will stand before Him in heaven, having completed their earthly journey with all of its challenges. And that moment begins an eternity with no end, an eternity of living in God's presence with all those who have persevered with their hope fixed on Jesus during their long and difficult life journey, oh what a day that will be! That my friends, helps to put difficult times here in perspective, doesn't it? *Do you have the certainty that the Lord Jesus Christ, King of kings, will present you with a crown of eternal life in heaven when you come to the end of your earthly life journey?* Can you praise Him right now?

And here's a song to help us celebrate that moment of arriving in heaven, with Jesus!

Today's Scripture is James 1:9-12.