

Loyalty in Perspective
James 1:5-11, Matt 6:24-27

Brothers and sisters, do you have enough or are you lacking something? Or perhaps the better way to ask that question is what are you seeking more of? What are you pursuing?

Some of us are pursuing our education, we are working towards our college or university degree, or pursuing our Master's, or upgrading our qualifications. Education in its various forms is really the gateway to getting more out of life and to be able to have more in life. That's why we're always telling kids to go to school – even if it's trades school.

Some of us are pursuing relationships, we want to find connection, companionship, and community. Perhaps we are pursuing that special someone who could be Mr. or Mrs. Right so that you can then pursue a future and a family together.

Maybe some of us are pursuing meaning and significance or a vision for something, we want our lives to impact others, to make a difference in this world, to count for something after

we are gone and to leave a legacy by which others will remember and celebrate us. And I'm sure that some of us are seeking more money as well and I don't say this as a criticism.

I'm well aware that the cost-of-living increase makes it more and more difficult to make ends meet each month. I know that many young people want to be able to buy a home, make investments that can bring benefits to themselves and their families. I know that it's often difficult to consider starting a family when the funds are low. Not to mention that you need money if you are going to pursue meaning and purpose, or finding Mrs. Right, or paying for your education.

And even if we are just trying to improve our mental or physical health and having a better attitude about life – even if we are doing so through pursuing spiritual growth; attending church more often, getting involved and serving, or giving to God's Kingdom, we'll discover pretty quickly that doing so would be a lot easier... if we had more money.

It's much easier to have a good attitude about life when you can afford it right? It's a lot easier to attend church when you don't have to work on Sunday mornings because you need that extra shift to pay the bills, right? My Christian witness would be so much better if I wasn't always stressed and fighting with my spouse about money! Right?

So, when it comes to the question about having enough, or if we are lacking in anything – though we might not admit it as first, and perhaps we might be ashamed to admit it later - most of us would probably admit that whatever we are lacking could be solved by having more money, by being wealthy.

And even if it does not solve what we lack – certainly having wealth would seem to make it far easier to sail serenely through all the trials and challenges and storms of life. Very few of us would argue with the popular thinking, the popular perspective that says *“it's far better to go through life **with** money, than **without!**”*

But, James challenges this perspective brothers and sisters. He certainly agrees that we are dealing with lacking something – last Sunday we learned that loyal perseverance through the trials in our lives will complete us so we are lacking nothing – but, we are all still in the process of perseverance finishing its work, we're not yet complete and we are still lacking.

And James' perspective on what we lack goes against popular thinking, instead of saying that we lack money – James' identifies that we lack wisdom. So, would you agree with him? Is that your perspective as well? Is this how we would think?

Certainly, this is the bible's perspective on the matter, Prov 3:14-16 says wisdom *“is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold, more precious than rubies..”* and Prov 16:16 says it *“better to get wisdom than gold, to get insight rather than silver!”*

Now this is where loyalty in perspective comes in brothers and sisters. Are we willing to be loyal to Jesus in our perspectives? Will we adjust our perspectives, how we see things, how we

think about things, and adopt Jesus' perspective instead of keeping our own?

Are we willing to say "Jesus' has a different perspective and I'm loyal to Him so I choose to see things His way instead!"

And just to be clear, Jesus' perspective is whatever the scriptures, the Old and New Testament, have to say about anything. Jesus is in the Old Testament as the Word of God. When God spoke – that was Jesus, pre-incarnate.

Then, as John 1:14 says "the Word became Flesh!" and the incarnate Jesus lived and taught among us on earth, saying *"Don't think I've come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I've not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matt 5:17) So, whatever the bible has to say and teach us is what Jesus' has to say and teach us brothers and sisters.

So this message about loyalty in perspective is about adopting new perspectives, because that's how Jesus sees things and we want to be loyal and stay loyal to him in all things. And

there are four perspectives in this passage that we need to align ourselves with. The first we covered already and that is a perspective about what we are truly lacking, it is wisdom.

Secondly there is a perspective about God, thirdly a perspective IN prayer, and fourthly a perspective on how this works out in our lives.

So being loyal to Jesus, changing our perspective about what's lacking in our lives, adopting the perspective that we are lacking wisdom, we then discover good news! James says *"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."* That is GOOD news!

And this brings us to James' perspective on God and we see God presented as someone who gives. The Greek composition of this verse literally says the "giving God" in the same way as we might say Almighty God, or All-knowing God, here He is the Giving God. Furthermore, God gives generously, without discriminating or finding excuses not to give, and if we wanted

to say that God is good – this is an excellent example of why we can say that.

It reminds us of Jesus' words in Matt 5:45 *"Your Heavenly Father... causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"* and in Matt 7:9-11 *"if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone... how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

So, what is our perspective on God? You know, I think we agree with this in theory but we are extremely hesitant to embrace this perspective fully in practice. We'd say *"of course God is giving broadly speaking, but just because God CAN give doesn't mean the He WILL give."* Because what if someone takes us at our word and asks God for something and they don't receive it? What happens to our perspective on God when that occurs?

Well, our perspective starts to see God as denying us, as not coming through for us. We start thinking that He is at fault for

whatever we are lacking. We feel like maybe He didn't give us something because He's found fault with us, He's punishing us. We see that God gives to other people, but not to me. We start to believe that God is limiting us with His rules and laws and expectations. Our true perspective on God comes out when God doesn't give what we ask for.

The truth is that we're all one unanswered prayer request away from this perspective emerging from our sinful hearts brothers and sisters. If the trial is specific enough, hard enough, long enough... the loyalty in our perspective about God is put to the test and we are tempted to see otherwise.

That's why we need to know about loyalty in perspective, esp. about God, because our loyalty must not be based on what things look like in the midst of a trial or the impact of an unanswered prayer request in our lives. Instead, we must decide to adopt Jesus' perspective to replace our own. Remember... Jesus had God say NO to Him as well when He asked *"Is there no other way?"* and I can well imagine that

there was a protracted silence that took place before Jesus continued and say *“yet not my will but yours be done.”*

Brothers and sisters – Jesus knows God is a giving God, He **gave** His only begotten son to save us and Jesus **gave** His life to suffer for us, He was confident that God’s plan was good. So this can settle it for us regardless of unanswered prayers.

But now we are faced with a perspective on prayer – and perhaps when God says no to something we’ve asked Him to give us, its precisely to make us aware of our perspectives on things. To bring them up to the surface where we can deal with them through making a decision to swap them out for Jesus’ perspectives so we remain loyal.

So our perspective in prayer is very closely related to our perspective on God, and often times that means we think that prayer is all about God. And how often do we tell people that prayer is talking to God just like you would talk to your friends – just tell Him what you need etc... but that’s not what Jesus said about prayer.

Jesus teaching on prayer in Matt 6 is less about God’s role and ability to answer prayers, and more about us coming to prayer in the proper spirit and attitude, right? And that is reflected here in James’ perspective on prayer as well.

Now, a word of caution here about misunderstanding and misusing how James makes **“answered prayer”** contingent upon **how** we pray. In fact, James himself realizes how easy it is to abuse this, so he follows up with practical examples of how we apply it in our personal circumstances in vs. 9-11.

So I encourage you brothers and sisters, when someone confides they have been praying for something but they are not receiving it – do not diagnose their situation by saying they are not be praying in faith, or not believing enough, or that they must be harboring doubt in their hearts, and then imply that if they pray with more faith, or vanquish their doubts – their prayer will then be answered.

It’s far better, more helpful and biblical to ask them if the delay in the answer is testing their faith or tempting them to

doubt? Do you see the difference there? If it is... then you can encourage them to continue praying with faith that God is a giving God. Reassure them that He will give **good** things to His children, to have no doubts that He will bring good from whatever trial they are praying through, and that He will use it to complete us for the Day of Christ!

Use **your** loyalty to Jesus' perspective in prayer to pray with them, and help them to remain loyal! And if you're wondering if James would recommend this or if I'm just reading it into his letter – look at the closing line of his letter; *“remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”* Keep each other loyal brothers and sisters.

But how do we apply this perspective to ourselves? A bit more stringently – because we are in the best position to evaluate our hearts and minds and motives, the Holy Spirit helping us, to determine **how** we are praying to receive wisdom from God.

Are you praying in faith, are you confident that God IS a giving God that brings good out of evil and that He will give you wisdom to help you account as a joy whatever trials and challenges come into your life?

Are you doubting? And please understand these are not intellectual or doctrinal doubts – how is it possible for God to be three persons but one essence? How do I reconcile my apparent free will against God's sovereign election? Rather the Greek word is better translated as “double-mindedness” (*there's that loyalty angle again, right?*) It has connotations of making up a list of pro's and con's because you are uncertain.

It means you are sitting on the fence – or to use James' example you're in a boat that has no ballast to direct it, and it goes wherever the waves push it, so you have no direction, you are not really committed to one way or the other.

And I think the best way to apply this to ourselves when we are dealing with a delayed answer in prayer, when we continue to face a trial even though we are praying to be

delivered out of it, is to ask ourselves if we are truly committed to God's using the trial to test our loyalty, develop perseverance and let perseverance finish its work in us? Or are we undecided about that still?

Maybe we are hoping there is another way that we can become mature and complete without have to endure various trials, or maybe we are angry about the trial we're enduring – it is wrong, unjust, it shouldn't happen, to Christians! In all honestly we don't *want* God to use it for good – we want Him to deliver us from the trial - not refine us through it!

We want to be vindicated in these circumstances, to see justice brought about, not be shaped to become more like Christ. Can't God use the next Dunamis conference to work on my sanctification instead?

But in this way brothers and sisters, we are being double-minded. We are not committed to our sanctification through the path of hardship, and we don't really want to receive wisdom we are praying for to help us walk this path.

And if that is the case, then James says it negates what we are asking God for – He won't give us that wisdom. Now what James doesn't say here – but implies through warning how this impacts your whole life - is that if we are wrestling with, this double-mindedness, this doubt, then our prayer needs to switch from asking for wisdom to asking for forgiveness.

Confess this double mindedness, this disloyalty to Jesus so that you can commit to the path the Lord is taking you down and have the Holy Spirit change your heart so you are able - in faith and with the intent to account the trial you endure as a joy – ask for the wisdom you are lacking.

Now this is a hard Word to receive. That is why I say this is for us to personally reflect on, with the help of the Holy Spirit and before God – we don't go diagnosing this in other people.

This is best discerned where the Holy Spirit can gently convict us, and help us work through our anger, resistance, disappointment that we need to confess. It's something we can ask our pastor or other brothers and sisters who know this road themselves, to help us with as we work to align ourselves

with God's purposes, so that we can be in that place to pray – single mindedly, in faith, with a fully loyal heart, so we will know how to let perseverance finish its work to make us complete for the Day of Christ.

And just to make sure that we really understand what it looks like to adopt this perspective on prayer for our daily lives, along with the perspective on God and about lacking wisdom, in vs. 9-11 James describes these *"perspectives in action."*

Now at the start of this message I noted today's popular perspective believes **a lack of money** is cause of most trials and challenges in life, and that **having more money** makes it easier to deal with the trials and challenges of life – and people in James' day thought the same way.

So James instructs us how loyalty in perspective applies to life circumstances where you are lacking money, and curiously... but even more importantly – how loyalty in perspective also needs to be worked out in wealthy circumstances!

So, brothers and sisters, should you find yourselves in humble circumstances where you are lacking in money, James exhorts you to adopt Christ's perspective on what you truly lack, not money... but wisdom. Then, assuming that you've prayed for wisdom and have received it, you are able to do as James exhorts and *"take pride in your high position."*

Why? Because you see your humble circumstances from Jesus' perspective, and they put into stark contrast all the riches we have been given in Jesus. Paul is all over this perspective in the first chapter of Ephesians; vs.3 we are blessed *"with spiritual riches in the heavenly places,"* vs.7-8 he mentions *"the riches of His grace that are lavished upon us,"* and in vs. 18 he speaks of *"the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints."*

Now lest you think this is all just pie in the sky by and by... don't forget how Jesus answered Peter's complaint that of leaving good paying jobs, property and family out of loyalty to Jesus. In Mark 10:29-30 Jesus replies saying *"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the*

gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.”

Brothers and sisters, if you are in humble circumstances, you put loyalty in perspective by seeing things this way – even if it looks different to you, because this is how Jesus sees it.

And it works the same way when you have money and wealth, in fact, James insists, it’s even more important to do so when we have wealth, and this this is Jesus’ perspective as well brothers and sisters. We read Matt 6:24 this morning where Jesus warns us that we can’t serve both God and money. That’s being double minded, and disloyal to Jesus.

So, if we are... rich – I was going to say “blessed” with riches like we usually do – but that isn’t the perspective James has here. While it is proper to acknowledge riches as blessings from the Lord, we can get way too comfortable with that and in doing so we grow inured to the innate temptation that they

bring with them for our sinful nature. James wants us to watch out for that, because riches can quietly and subtly but significantly change our perspective. J-Lo might sing “*don’t be fooled by the rocks (diamonds) that I’ve got- I’m still Jenny from the block*” but... is she really? No not at all.

So, staying loyal to Jesus when we are wealthy requires us to keep the perspective that we, are lacking in wisdom, and that’s a lot harder to do when we are not lacking much and we know how to handle our business.

And, staying loyal to Jesus when we are rich requires that we retain our perspective on God and prayer and continue to ask Him for what we need, and that’s a lot harder to do when we don’t really need anything and we can easily buy whatever it is that we need.

Furthermore, staying loyal to Jesus when we have money requires that we embrace the perspective about hardship, suffering and trials being necessary to complete us for eternal

life, because they are all so much easier to avoid when wealthy.

And lastly staying loyal to Jesus we must keep the perspective that the goal of life is our holiness, not happiness. So, if our meeting that goal of holiness requires us to sacrifice money, we must be willing to pay the cost and invest in the Kingdom of Heaven. Our worldly wealth is temporary – just like fading flowers – but holiness passes into eternity with Jesus Christ.

So brothers and sisters, this is James' biblical, and Christ-focused, perspective on "loyalty in perspectives." God helping us let's make it out perspective as well. Will you commit to that this morning... Amen??

Ok - let me close with one last scripture verse, to help put this all in perspective for us. Prov 30: 7-9 which says *"Two things I ask of you, Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much*

and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God."

So, brothers and sisters, I'll ask you again... Do you have enough? As we have learned this morning having enough is a matter of... perspective, and that's why its so important we stay loyal to Jesus in all our perspectives.

Receive this as the Lord's word to you for God's glory. Amen.