

Read also Psalm 73. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).

Money, money, money, *mon-ey*. It's a song that we don't want to get stuck in our head! But reading or hearing the daily news, it's hard not to think about. This week's headlines: "Fears that Oil Price Crash Threatens the Economy"

Prosperity, according to the media, is centered on a strong economy. What if the headlines were like this:

- Marriage Rate Up, Children Thrive
- Kindness Abounds, City Flourishes
- Nation Prospers as Divorce Drops to Ten Percent
- People Return to Church in Doves, Volunteer Services Increase

What causes prosperity in your mind?

According to James, it is reality shaped by the truths of your faith. READ James 1:9-11 (*NLT*)

James is identifying who we are in Christ—people rich in God. The poor are elevated and the rich humbled.

James wants us to see reality from God's perspective.

If your financial state is humble, that does not define you. What Christ gives you lifts you up in status to one having great wealth. That is, James says, "You have the resources of God available to you."

On the other hand, those who have wealth are humbled. To be humbled about money is to realize that your wealth is actually a mirage that will not help you with important things.

A terrible tragedy happened to the family of hedge owner Thomas Gilbert, Sr. who was allegedly killed by his son because of an ill-placed priority on money. No amount of wealth can help.

James is not saying wealth is bad, but that it is a bad god.

Jesus talked about this:

"No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Lk 16:13).

Riches and accomplishment are false gods which will not fulfill you.

If wealth and success were truly good gods, then you would see a better track record. But each time there is an economic downfall, such as 2008 or the Stock market crash of 1929, you see a string of suicides of wealthy, important people.

In fact, a good economy can even have a bad effect on average, everyday people, says Alexis de Tocqueville. He was a French historian and philosopher who studied economics. His book

*Democracy in America* includes, “Why the Americans are so Restless in the Midst of their Prosperity:”

“A native of the United States clings to this world's goods as if he were certain never to die; he is so hasty in grasping at all within his reach that one would suppose he was constantly afraid of not living long enough to enjoy them. He clutches everything, he holds nothing fast, but soon loosens his grasp to pursue fresh gratifications.”

Tocqueville calls it “a strange melancholy that haunts the inhabitants . . . in the midst of abundance.”<sup>1</sup>

He wrote those words almost 200 years ago. This shows that our issues with money have always been a problem.

Here’s how it plays out for God. READ James 2:1-7 (*The Message*)

When George Mueller became a pastor in England, he was paid from money his church received from renting its front pews to rich church members. Poor members had to sit in the “cheap” seats in the back. George told them that this had to stop. So he even stopped taking a salary and trusted God to meet his needs, and God did.

Later George felt called to open an orphanage so he asked God to provide a building, people to oversee it, furniture, and money for food and clothing. God answered his prayers. The needs of the orphanage were met each day. Over 10,000 children lived there through time. When each child became old enough to live on his own, George would put a Bible in his right hand and a coin in his left. He explained to the young person that if he held onto what was in his right hand, God would always make sure there was something in his left hand as well.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps there’s more we need to learn about God’s ability to provide when we recognize the value of every person. But if we are stuck thinking that the rich or riches are the more important thing, then we limit ourselves greatly.

Once, a chaplain at Children’s Hospital went into the chapel to pray. On the altar lay seven pennies next to the giant open Bible. After some time, a man who sat silently in the shadows, head bowed, looked up and motioned, whispering, “Come here, come here.” He poured out the story of his young son, a patient, and how much it hurt to see him sick and be unable to help him. So the man explained that he comes to the chapel to pray. He believes God will help. And while he prayed one day a desire came into his heart to make an offering. It was not an obligation or ritual, but rather a gift to the One he has found there in the silence and whom he loves. It reflects their communion. But he reaches into his pocket and he only has seven pennies.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), pages 136-139. From [http://static.sewanee.edu/faculty/Willis/Civil\\_War/documents/TocquevilleRestless.html](http://static.sewanee.edu/faculty/Willis/Civil_War/documents/TocquevilleRestless.html), accessed January 7, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> From <http://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/church-history-for-kids/george-mueller-orphanages-built-by-prayer-11634869.html>, accessed January 7, 2015.

If you were a rich man, would you give seven pennies to the Master of the universe? If you were not so rich, would you give them?

With the utmost modesty the man made his intended offering to the powerful One he found in that room. He did not resent his circumstances, although he was truly sad. He found in that place of sorrow a God who, although powerful, was in that room to meet him. God, the Creator of all, accepted his offering as if it was a million dollars. The man would have given a million dollars at that moment if he had it. His gift was a grateful response to the loving Presence he experienced.<sup>3</sup>

James says in God's eyes, every single person has incredible value. God honors the one who humbly seeks him. The man felt comforted that no matter what happened, he was not alone, and that was *wealth* which could never be replaced.

Do you really want to settle for a lesser God like riches?

1 John explains it like this:

“For all that is in the world -- the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches -- comes not from the Father but from the world. And the world and its desire are passing away, but those who do the will of God live forever” (v. 16-17).

Let us give honor based on God's opinion not the world's values.

Later in his letter, James tells us what happens to those who cling to riches:

“Look here, you rich people: Weep and groan with anguish because of all the terrible troubles ahead of you. Your wealth is rotting away, and your fine clothes are moth-eaten rags. Your gold and silver have become worthless. The very wealth you were counting on will eat away your flesh like fire. This treasure you have accumulated will stand as evidence against you on the day of judgment” (5:1-3).

Harsh words. It seems insulting. But what he is doing is exposing the underbelly of making money an idol.

When we feel envious or poor or just plain wish we had more, remember how the Psalmist was lifted up by God when he confessed his struggle and God made things plain to him:

I'm still in your presence, but you've taken my hand. You wisely and tenderly lead me, and then you bless me. You're all I want in heaven!

You're all I want on earth! When my skin sags and my bones get brittle,  
GOD is rock-firm and faithful. Look! Those who left you are falling apart!

Deserters, they'll never be heard from again. But I'm in the very presence of GOD—oh, how refreshing it is! (73:23-27)

Heed this sage advice. Be warned. Do not make money or success your idol. God has provided you much greater wealth. AMEN

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<sup>3</sup> Ginger Hertenstein, “The Seven Penny Offering,” 2007.

**James 1:9-11 *NLT***

“Believers who are poor have something to boast about, for God has honored them. And those who are rich should boast that God has humbled them. They will fade away like a little flower in the field. The hot sun rises and the grass withers; the little flower droops and falls, and its beauty fades away. In the same way, the rich will fade away with all of their achievements.”

**James 2:1-7 *The Message***

My dear friends, don't let public opinion influence how you live out our glorious, Christ-originated faith. If a man enters your church wearing an expensive suit, and a street person wearing rags comes in right after him, and you say to the man in the suit, “Sit here, sir; this is the best seat in the house!” and either ignore the street person or say, “Better sit here in the back row,” haven't you segregated God's children and proved that you are judges who can't be trusted? Listen, dear friends. Isn't it clear by now that God operates quite differently? He chose the world's down-and-out as the kingdom's first citizens, with full rights and privileges. This kingdom is promised to anyone who loves God. And here you are abusing these same citizens! Isn't it the high and mighty who exploit you, who use the courts to rob you blind? Aren't they the ones who scorn the new name—“Christian”—used in your baptisms?