

Chapter IV

THE RICH MAN SHALL FADE IN HIS WAYS

The Jews of the *diaspora* to whom James wrote were shown their need of salvation by James's reference to the wisdom of God. He revealed this kind of wisdom could not be obtained by those who vacillated from one position to another. In this age the true believer, through the preaching of the Word of God and the quickening power of the Spirit of God, has been given the gift of faith in Jesus Christ, as well as the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God performs many ministries to the believer and through the believer. He is an *Earnest*, or pledge, from God to the believer to assure him God will fulfill all of His promises to him. He is an ever-present Help, causing the believer both *to will and to do of His good pleasure*. He was the One Who caused *holy men of old to write* the Word of God by inspiration of the Spirit, which means the Scriptures were God *breathed*. Therefore a *walk in the Spirit* is a walk of faith which will not, yea which cannot, deviate from the truth of the Word of God and is accomplished by faith through the gifts of the Spirit, energized by the Spirit.

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

The true believer is able to come *unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* to attain a level of maturity in Christ, through the preaching and teaching of the Word of God and the quickening ministry of the Spirit of God. However babes in Christ (who have not yet matured in the Lord) can be carried about by every wind of doctrine the Devil brings their way through the deceit of men. Most of the Jews to whom James wrote were unsaved, but it is possible some of them were believers who merely lacked spiritual maturity.

James knew the Jews very well. He knew each of their arguments and opinions would have to be disarmed even before they were expressed. Thus he wrote:

Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. (James 1:9-11)

This statement was designed to counteract the Jews' belief that the possession of riches was evidence of the approbation of God. The Jews put great stock in the individual who was rich, and so does this world's system. It matters not the subject: religion, politics, the natural world, according to the song, *When you're rich, they think you really know*. This attitude was another of the many components of the Jewish mind. This mind had been shaped by many years of traditional misinterpretations of the Scriptures. Since the law promised blessings for performance and curses for nonperformance, it was assumed wealth was a reward for righteousness and poverty, or physical maladies, a judgment. Despite the Jews' point of view and that of the world, our Lord taught, *life does not consist in the abundance of things which a man possesses*:

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Mark 8:36-37)

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

The attitude of the Jews toward those less fortunate than themselves is seen in the relationship of the religious rulers in Israel toward the man who was born blind:

... the Jews did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight. And they asked them, saying, Is this your son, who ye say was born blind? How then doth he now see? His parents answered them and said, We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: but by what means he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: he is of age; ask him: he shall speak for himself.

These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him. Then again called they the man that was blind, and said unto him, Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner. He answered and said, Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.

Then said they to him again, What did he to thee? How opened he thine eyes? He answered them, I have told you already, and ye did not hear: wherefore would ye hear it again? Will ye also be his disciples? Then they reviled him, and said, Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses' disciples. We know that God spake unto Moses: as for this fellow, we know not from whence he is.

The man answered and said unto them, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not from whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, Thou was altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. (John 9:18-34, emphasis mine)

The leaders of the Jews, for the most part, had wealth and power. They wielded their power in an unscrupulous manner. This is easily seen in their relationship with the man who had been born blind. They agreed, before ever hearing the facts, if anyone confessed Jesus to be the Christ, they would excommunicate them from the synagogue. Their attitude of superiority was clearly expressed in their statement to the man who had been blind: *Thou was altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?* This attitude had been passed from generation to generation to the Jews to whom James wrote.

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

Nevertheless James sought, as Solomon of old, to change their minds and bring them to the purpose of life, which is definitely not the amassing of wealth. It makes no difference whether a man is rich or poor: *It is appointed unto man once to die*. Like the grass and the flower, natural life no sooner comes forth and blooms until it is gone. Thus Solomon wrote:

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? (Ecclesiastes 5:10-16)

After considering almost everything a man might conceive to be his reason for living, Solomon brought the book of Ecclesiastes to an end when he wrote:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be [of the] good [One], or whether it be [of the] evil [one]. (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

To fear God, and keep His commandments means: no matter what a man is, or what he has done, in order for him to come into a right relationship with God, he must hold God and His Word in reverence and believe the truth of the Word of God. This, of course, cannot be accomplished by the will of the natural man. It is a work of the Spirit of God through the preaching of the Word of God. Thus man's failed attempts at religion and law-keeping must fall to the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is received by God's grace through faith.

This is the reason a man can count himself happy when his *faith* is tried, for the only faith

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

that can withstand being tried is *the faith*: the body of truth revealed in the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is *the resurrection and the life*. An untried faith provides no tangible hope in life and absolutely no hope in death. If there is no real hope in death, we might just as well *eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die*. Therefore James continued:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. (James 1:12-21, emphasis mine)

These remarks, it must be remembered, were spoken to the Jews of *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*. It must also be remembered that these Jews, as members of the nation of Israel, had been the custodians of the truth. The gospel, *how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures*, had been preached to them in the sacrificial system and typology of the Old Testament Scriptures. Consequently the reception of the engrafted word, which had been a vital part of the Jews' religion before it was corrupted by the traditions of the elders, was able to save their souls. So James encouraged these Jews to receive the engrafted word and reject the foolish notions of the Rabbis.

The Rabbis taught the Jews that the evil and corruption which confronts man was of God. They taught the people that God used these things to test man's righteousness. Thus man's ability

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

to shun temptation was a proving ground for his righteousness, which he obtained by the works of the law. This was the essence of rabbinical teaching. James countered these false Jewish ideas by teaching the Jews that evil is intrinsic. It is the result of a fallen nature, which is common to all mankind. Temptation is not of God, as the Rabbis said; it does not test a man and force him to greater holiness and dedication to God. Rather it provides evidence that man is a fallen creature, who cannot be justified by the deeds of the law. Consequently James wrote:

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. (James 1:13-15)

James sought to bring the Jews into a proper understanding of their relationship with God. He did this to counter the natural tendency of the Jews to cling to the past and to their traditions. Therefore James sought to get the Jews to see themselves as they really were. In most cases the trial of the Jews' faith revealed it was a vain faith. It was a faith predicated upon their dead works rather than on the immutable promises of God. It was a faith that was ignorant of God's righteousness, and one which sought to establish its own righteousness. Consequently it was a faith which had deviated from the firm foundation upon which it had been founded, so that it was no longer *the faith, once delivered unto the saints*.

James knew the weak points of the Jews' faith. He had been steeped in it until he himself had been saved. At first, he had clung to the law as if it were, in itself, a source of life. Nevertheless, like all of us, he had to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. After nearly getting the apostle Paul killed over a Jewish vow, James was forced to rethink his position. The writer to the Hebrews undoubtedly helped him much in that direction:

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. (Hebrews 9:11-17, emphasis mine)

If the Jews' faith was genuine, it would have provided them with a crown of life; if it was genuine, their conscience would have been purged from dead works. So the task of James was to bring his Jewish brethren, *the twelve tribes scattered abroad*, into a viable relationship with Jesus Christ: to understand that it was He Who was able to begin at Moses and the Prophets and expound unto His disciples, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself.

The period of time in which James wrote was towards the end of time spanned by the book of Acts. He wrote during a period of transition, when the Jews, who had been the custodians of the truth, were being cut off and a *wild branch*, the New Testament church, was being grafted in to be the new custodian of the truth. This did not happen all at once. In fact this transition, in which the Jews and the church both operated by the authority of God, spanned about forty years, until Israel ceased to exist as a nation and the temple was destroyed.

After the destruction of the temple, there was no longer a place of sacrifice to typify the ministry of the promised Messiah. The law, all righteousness and the sacrificial system had been fulfilled by our Lord Jesus Christ, so that there was no longer a reason for them. The authority

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

of the church had been fully established by the apostles *with signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit*. This authority was certainly not recognized by the majority of the Jews; but for those whose hearts had been made receptive by the Holy Spirit, it was evident the message the church preached was in fulfillment of all that had been promised in the various covenants of the Old Testament, which pointed to the cross of Calvary. This was not a new faith, but a culmination of *the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*.

Our Lord said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*. Consequently the Old Testament saint was saved by faith in the promise of God portrayed in the shadows and types of the sacrificial system. Once Christ had come and fulfilled the shadows and types, some of the Jewish believers, like James, had mixed emotions. They were drawn between their old habits in Judaism and the fulfillment of the truth in Christ. The book of Hebrews was written for the specific purpose of solving the misunderstandings of the Jews. James, who had had some misunderstandings of his own, was now fully settled in the faith and wrote to the twelve tribes, scattered abroad, to evangelize them.

In the book of Hebrews we learn Old Testament saints were counted under the new covenant, the same as believers in this church age, after our Lord was crucified, buried and risen from the dead. Further, comparing the book of Ephesians with the book of Hebrews, we learn the souls of the Old Testament saints, who had died looking forward to the promise of God, were taken into heaven when our Lord *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men*.

The redeemed of the Old Testament are seen in the twelfth chapter of the book of Hebrews as the *souls of just men made perfect*, and they are also seen in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

as, *they without us could not be made perfect*. They could not be made perfect without us because Christ had not yet died; but when He died, He was glorified in resurrection and could then perfect them, as well as us, when He *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men*. This explains why not a single sin of an Old Testament saint is recorded in the eleventh chapter of the book of Hebrew, or anywhere else in the New Testament for that matter. Despite the ages, or covenants under which they lived, by the judicial reckoning of God through the blood of Christ, *Their sins and iniquities will I remember against them no more*.

All of this has been made possible by the promises of God, which were fulfilled in Christ, so that when our Lord *led captivity captive and gave gifts to men*, though not directly stated, it is implied that the Old Testament saints were baptized with the Spirit of God, because *if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*. In the great commission, recorded in the book of Mark, our Lord said, *He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*. This baptism cannot be ritual baptism, but the baptism of the Spirit because Paul wrote:

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

To properly understand these verses, they should be read without reference to the Old Testament or the New Testament. Our God is an immutable God, so whether you are in the Old Testament or the New Testament, *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*. Reading these verses in the light of the immutability of God, we should certainly understand that Old Testament saints were saved by faith in the promise of

The Rich Man Shall Fade in His Ways

the coming Savior, but they could not be baptized by the Spirit then, because *Christ was not yet glorified*.

James continued his evangelistic efforts to the Jews by telling them to be *slow to speak and slow to wrath, for the wrath of man does not work the righteousness of God*. Thus James encouraged the Jews to be like the Jews at Berea of whom the Apostle Paul spoke:

These [Berean Jews] were more noble than those [Jews] in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. (Acts 17:11)

James did not want the Jews, to whom he wrote, to be like the majority of the Jews, who were quick to speak and quick to wrath. Most of the Jews would not keep their mouths shut long enough to hear the Word of God. Rather than responding in faith, most of the Jews responded in wrath. The ones who did so were like those Jews who hounded Paul's steps at Lystra during Paul's first missionary journey, where they enlisted the efforts of the citizenry and stoned Paul for his proclamation of the gospel. They then dragged Paul's body to the dump, where they left him for dead. If those Jews, who stoned Paul, had received the engrafted word, which Paul had preached to them, it would have saved their souls; but in their RELIGIOUS ZEAL, they would not hear it.