

“The Father of Lights”

April 29, 2012

Text: James 1:16-18

**Success in the Xn life is always bolstered by our focusing on
the goodness/greatness of our God.**

He showers us with daily benefits, such as food/shelter/clothing,
strength of body, soundness of mind, & countless mercies.

In addition, He has created a beautiful world for us to live in
& has sent His only-begotten Son to die/atone for our sins.

But it isn't that God is good simply because He does such
wonderful things for us.

He is inherently good—by His very nature/character.

He would be just as good if He had never created us, or
anything else.

As we have discovered in James 1, God tries/tests believers, but
even that is a demonstration of His love for us, and His
infinite goodness towards us.

He intends our tests/trials to strengthen our faith.

In fact, when they have caused a believer to grow/mature,
he can sense more than ever the goodness of God.

E.g. in 1851, a missionary named Allen Gardiner was at
Picton Island off the southern tip of South America.

At the age of 57, he died there of disease/starvation.

He had served there faithfully in spite of physical
difficulties, and hardships such as

hunger/thirst/injury/loneliness.

Yet this was the final entry found in his diary=> “I am overwhelmed w/ the sense, of the goodness of God.”

In the section of James 1, we have just studied, James has assured us that God could never tempt anyone to sin.

In verse 13, he wrote=> “*Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God.’*”

Apparently, that’s exactly what someone was saying,
which is why James wrote that no one is to do so.
He goes on to explain that temptation comes from our own
lust.

But Satan will seize every opportunity to raise doubts about the
goodness of God’s character, when we are suffering trials.

If our faith doesn’t hold strong, and we allow trials to
become temptations to sin, Satan will suggest that
God is actually the One who is tempting us.

For that reason, James opens our text today w/ a warning=>

[James 1:16]=> => “*Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.*”

Satan wants to shake our faith in our Lord by deceiving us
about His inherent goodness, and we must not allow
him to do so.

Instead, out of concern for his “*beloved brethren,*” James
is going to tell his readers (including us) to focus our
hearts on the goodness/greatness of our God.

**In this morning’s text, we will uncover 5 aspects of God’s
goodness/greatness...**

He is generous/transcendent/unchanging/sovereign/worthy.

*** God Is Generous**

[Verse 17a]=> *“Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above,”*

The phrase, “good thing bestowed,” refers to the act of giving.

“Perfect gift” refers to the gift itself, that God gives.

So every good giving, & every perfect gift, is all from God.

God’s giving is “good” because He has a giving nature, He gives w/o ulterior motives, & as Jms 1:5 says, He gives generously.

In some ways, He gives good things indiscriminately.

E.g. Mt 5=> *“He causes His **sun** to rise on the evil and the good, and sends **rain** on the righteous and the unrighteous” (5:45).*

Both sun/rain are essential to man’s existence, so God gives them freely/generously to everyone, even His enemies.

But God has a special giving-relationship w/ His own children.

E.g. Mt 7=> *“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is **good** to those who ask Him!” (7:11).*

In Mt 6, God even gives the little birds of His creation their food, and then He says to us (in essence), “If I’m that faithful in providing for birds, and you are worth so much more to Me than they, why would you ever doubt that I will take care of your needs?” (6:25-26).

The phrase “*every perfect gift*” means every complete gift.

God always gives the perfect gift, complete and lacking nothing necessary for the good of the recipient—unmixed blessing.

E.g. He so loved the world, He *gave* His only begotten Son, so that, believing in Him, we might have eternal life.

He works “*all things*” together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to His purposes.

Do you believe God gives you good/perfect gifts—everything you need—because He’s your loving/generous Father?

As a child of God, it’s very important that you do.

Because Israel didn’t believe that, they went looking for other gods, and committed spiritual adultery.

Hos 2:5 quotes Israel as saying=> “*I will go after my lovers [false gods like Baal], Who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink*” (2:5).

I.e., I’ll go after false gods, trusting them to supply my needs, rather than the God of Israel.

In verse 8, God says=> “*It was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, And lavished on her silver and gold, Which they used for Baal.*”

Because Israel looked to false gods to provide them w/ security/contentment, God ultimately said=>

“*I will destroy her vines and fig trees, Of which she said, ‘These are my wages Which my lovers have given me’*” (2:12).

1 Tim 6 says that God=> “*richly supplies us with all things to*

enjoy” (6:17).

Do you enjoy them, and love God for giving them to you?
Why would we ever think for even a moment that such a
good/generous God would subject us to trials for any other
purpose than our good?

*** God Is Transcendent**

[Verse 17b]=> “*Every good thing bestowed and every perfect
gift is from **above**, **coming down** [pres. tense=> in a
continuing stream] **from the Father of lights,**”*

God is transcendent, in that He is above/beyond us all.

So when He gives us something, it must “*come down*” to us from
above.

In that sense, He lovingly stoops down to give us His good
gifts, because we are so far below Him.

When He gave us His Son, X first had to empty Himself
just to fit into our humanity.

In Isa 55, God said=> “*As the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts
than your thoughts*” (55:9).

In this context, God was talking about the transcendent
difference that makes His ways/thoughts so grand, so
big-hearted, so magnanimous, in comparison to ours.

2 verses earlier, He had said=> “*‘Let the wicked forsake his
way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; And let
him return to the LORD, And He will have
compassion on him; And to our God, For He will
abundantly **pardon.**’*” (55:7).

God's transcendence above us involves His infinite/limitless capacity for being good/gracious, compassionate/forgiving. He's a transcendent God, who condescends to forgive sin, because His ways/thoughts are so much higher than ours.

God is the “*Father of [the] lights*” (the definite article is included in the original text).

The “*lights*” James is talking about are the sun/moon/stars, (“*the two great lights*” & the stars), which Gen 1:16 says He created to govern the day and the night.

“*Father of the lights*” is an ancient Jewish title for God, because they reflect His glory as their Creator, in at least 3 different ways=>

1st, the sun/moon/stars reveal His greatness/power and His infinite majesty.

E.g., just consider the importance of the moon alone.

Without it, we would have worldwide tsunami waves doing have all the time.

And the earth's axis would constantly wobble, instead of being at a steady 23½ degree which gives us our 4 seasons year after year.

Psa 19:1=> “*The heavens are telling of the glory of God; & their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*”

Only a great/mighty God could create such a complex/magnificent universe for us to live in.

2nd, the sun/moon/stars are gracious gifts to us, from the lovingkindness of Him who is the “*Father of the lights.*”

Psa 136 calls us to give thanks, “*To Him who made the great lights, [Why?] For His lovingkindness is everlasting*” (Psa 136:7).

God’s gift to us of these celestial lights was an expression of His goodness and everlasting lovingkindness towards us.

3rd, their radiance tells of God’s transcendent glory, that He (their Creator) “*is light, & in Him there is no darkness at all*” (I Jn 1:5).

Jesus came into the world as the true light which enlightens every man (Jn 1:9), fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy=>
“*The Sunrise from on high shall visit us, / TO SHINE UPON THOSE WHO SIT IN DARKNESS AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH*” (Lk 1:78-79).

According to Rev 21, X’s glory will actually replace the sun in order to illuminate the New Jerusalem=>

“*The city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb*” (Rev 21:23).

God is light, in that He is the epitome of truth/righteousness.

Without the sun there could be no life, and w/o Jesus there can be no eternal life—only darkness of evil/deception and ultimately death.

Jesus came to us as the transforming light of God's glory,
the life-changing radiance of God's glory.

Or as Paul said it=> "*God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ*" (II Cor 4:6).

*** God Is Unchanging**

[Verse 17c]=> "*with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.*"

Light from the sun/moon does vary/shift.

They both create shadows that move with time, as these great celestial lights appear to make their way across the sky.

They each disappear from sight about half the time,
during every 24-hour rotation of the earth.

The moon also goes thru its cycle of phases about once/month.

But these variations contrast w/ God, who never varies at all.

In Mal 3, He says=> "*I, the LORD, do not change*" (3:6).

God's nature never changes; His character/attributes never change; His love for righteousness & His abhorrence of evil never change; His purposes never change; His love for us never changes; His election/calling of men/nations never change; nothing about Him ever changes.

God is permanently and infinitely perfect.

Someone: What about Ex 32:14: "*The LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.*"

You may remember that He had planned to destroy Israel
for worshiping the Golden Calf, until Moses offered
3 powerful arguments against God's doing so=>
His divine grace, His glory, and His faithfulness.
But please don't read that, as if God were a man, who
hadn't thought through these arguments Himself,
until Moses suggested them.

He's the One who'd taught them to Moses, in the 1st place.
He couldn't have forgotten them because He never forgets
anything.

God was simply demonstrating that God's hatred of sin doesn't
change (even for His own people) His commitment to His
own grace/glory/faithfulness don't change, even in the face
of His people's **disgrace/inglorious-shame/faithlessness**.

God is unchanging, so He will never go back on His promises.

In Jer 31, He promised the people of Israel that until the fixed
order of the sun/moon/stars ceases, they would always be a
nation before Him, forever.

The order hasn't ceased, & they're still a nation before
Him.

Nor will He ever deal with us who believe, as anything other than
His own beloved sons/daughters—He promises us that.
He will never discover anything about you/me that might
cause Him to rethink His having called/adopted us.

Rom 11=> *"The gifts and the calling of God are
irrevocable"* (11:29).

His chastening you at times won't mean that He has
rejected you as His child, but that He love/accepts
you as such, "*FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD
LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES
EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES*" (Heb 12:6).

His purposes for your life, and His sanctification of your
heart will never vary, or get off track.

His commitment to you will never wax/wane, nor will His
love for you grow hot/cold.

In fact, none of that will either grow/diminish, because He
is totally unchanging.

There may be other things in your life that change and create
instability and insecurity, but God isn't one of them, and
He never will be.

He is absolutely unchanging—no variation, no shifting-shadow.

*** God Is Sovereign**

[Verse 18a]=> "*In the exercise of His will He brought us forth
by the word of truth*"

God "*brought us forth*" by an act of His sovereign will.

What does "*brought us forth*" mean?

It's the same word translated "*gives birth to*" in verse 15.

God gave us birth spiritually causing us to be become born again.

And He did it by a sovereign act of His will.

He decided/willed/planned it, and according to Eph 1:4-5,

He did it all before the foundation of the world.

It says He chose us, & predestined us to adoption as His sons, *“according to the kind intention of **His will.**”*

The phrase *“In the exercise of His will”* (in our own text) is in the emphatic position in the original sentence, because James wants us to understand that God’s sovereign will (not ours) is determinative and is the basis for our new life in X.

The Apostle John put it like this=> *“As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who **believe** in His name, / who were born **not** of blood, **nor** of the will of the flesh, **nor** of the will of man, **but of God**”* (Jn 1:12-13).

Someone: But it says right there that those God saved were those who *“received”* X, so their will must have preceded, & must have been the primary cause of, their becoming born-again as children of God.

No, John specifically says, *“**nor** of the will of **man.**”*

God’s regenerating us, is what enabled us to receive/believe-in X.

Before we were regenerated, we were spiritually dead and incapable of using our will to believe in Him.

Titus 3:5=> *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his **mercy** he **saved** us, by the washing of **regeneration**, and **renewing** of the Holy Spirit.”*

Someone: Maybe we did something good to cause the H.S. to regenerate/renew us.

That’s exactly what Nicodemus assumed/thought, when he came to Jesus, asking=> *“How can a man be born*

[again] *when he is old?*” (Jn 3:4).

Jesus answered, in effect, Man can no more predict/control the Spirit’s regenerating activity, than he can predict/control the wind=> “*The **wind** [pneuma] blows where it wishes & you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from & where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the **Spirit** [pneuma]*” (Jn 3:8).

The H.S. regenerates/renews those who are sovereignly chosen by God for such merciful, undeserved, and favored treatment.

And His chose is not based on the merit of their righteous works.

The spiritually dead have no awareness of their sin.

Nor do they desire to turn from it, have the power to do so on their own, or have any awareness of their spiritual deadness.

I.e., they’re in no condition to do anything that might benefit them at all spiritually, until the H.S. regenerates them.

Eph 2=> “*God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, / even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by **grace** you have been saved)*” (2:4-5).

Just as a child’s will plays no part in his own physical birth, no man’s will plays any part in his spiritual rebirth either.

Until God (the Father of the lights) graciously fathers him &

“brings him forth,” man cannot/will-not become saved.

But once God does that, the man will employ his newly

regenerated will to believe in Jesus to forgive-him, cleanse-him, and renew-his-spirit, unto eternal life.

So our believing in Jesus’ death/resurrection for our soul’s salvation is a consequence of God’s regenerating us.

If you’re wondering whether/not you’ve done enough good to deserve that, the answer is, “No, but it doesn’t matter.”

All that matters is that God (because He is both gracious and sovereign) has “brought you forth” into eternal life, and you have believed in Jesus because of it.

By grace you have been saved, so relax and enjoy it.

James reminds us that when God brought us forth, He did so

“by the word of truth” (lit. “a word of truth”).

The means of our regeneration was a gospel message proclaiming

2 truth of God’s Word=>

1) That we were dead in sin, enemies of God, headed for hell.

2) But that God would graciously save us from our sin (& all its disastrous consequences), based on the meritorious life/death/resurrection of His Son, if we’d believe in Him.

However, that truth has been faithfully preached to thousands of people who have never received any blessing, including salvation.

The word of God is *“living and active & sharper than any two-edged sword, & piercing as far as the division of soul & spirit”* (Heb 4:12).

But it never pierced theirs. Why?

Because only as the H.S. prepares a person’s heart, does the scalpel of the Word do its two-edged surgery on that heart.

The *“imperishable seed”* of the Word (I Pet 1:23) is sown in the good heart-soil prepared by the HS (Mk 4:20), so that a person hears/accepts/embraces-it by faith.

Faith comes from hearing, hearing by a message/word of Christ (Rom 10:17), and suddenly it all makes sense to him, as the H.S. illuminates his mind.

In the words of Eph 1=> *“In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise”* (Eph 1:13).

** If I’m describing all that to someone who has never personally experienced it, but who would like to, pray for God, in His sovereignty, to do His work in your heart, & then read the Word, by which He does it.

X said=> *“Ask, & it shall be given to you; seek, & you shall find; knock, & it shall be opened to you”* (Mt 7:7).

If God has given you the will to ask/seek/knock for His truth, then for heaven’s sake, do it!

*** God Is Worthy**

Now James explains the purpose for which God has regenerated/saved us, & it all points to God's worthiness of our worship.

[Verse 18b]=> “so that we might be, as it were, the *first fruits* among His creatures.”

“*First fruits*” is an OT concept containing 2 basic ideas=>

- 1) God's people are holy/consecrated unto Himself.
- 2) God's people are a living prophecy of things to come.

Both these notions are bund up in the concept of our being “first fruits.”

First, in Deut 26, God commanded the Israelites to put some of the 1st produce they'd grown each year in a basket, bring it to Him in the Temple, and hand it to a priest as a sacrifice.

This is where the idea of “first fruits” originated.

It was holy/consecrated to God, and no one but a priest of God had a right to eat it—not even the farmer who grew it himself.

Then the priest who received it was to rejoice w/ the Israelite who had given it, in all the good things which the Lord had given him.

The Israelite wasn't to eat a single bite of his own harvest that year until he had first offered his basket of “first fruits, to the Lord.

Spiritually speaking, James says Xns are God's "first fruits"
today.

We have the dignity of being His peculiar treasure.

He takes particular delight in us, as holy unto Him alone,
and we rejoice in all the good He has done for us, as
His first fruits.

God has saved us, so that we might bring ourselves as an offering
to Him, presenting our bodies a living/holy sacrifice,
acceptable to God, as a spiritual act of worship (Rom 12:1).
Our possessions, our time, our energy/service all belong to
X.

Every true Xn can say, "*For me to live is X*" (Phil 1:21), so
the purpose of his life is to glorify His Lord, and to
extend His Kingdom by serving Him.

If a "Xn" cares nothing about whether the Church prospers,
or whether souls are being saved from hell, it's either
because he doesn't understand that he is part of the
first fruits that are holy unto X, or because he really
isn't the Lord's, & doesn't care.

If he spends his whole life serving himself, then he is his
own servant, not X's, and that which is not service to
X will be judged to be wood/hay/straw, for the fire.

Those who are His first-fruits, are consecrated to Him.

**Secondly, as "first fruits," God's people are a prophecy of
things to come.**

We are the only artifacts from the Kingdom era to come when X returns, that already exist in the world today.

We are a foretaste of things to come, because we already have eternal life within us.

When we are walking by the Spirit, we are a preview of the human race as it will exist during the Millennium.

Though not yet physically redeemed/resurrected, we are spiritually, giving the world a glimpse of its own future.

Rom 8=> *“The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the **children of God**. / For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now”* (Rom 8:21-22).

We’re the *“first fruits”* of a harvest that is yet to be reaped, God’s living proclamation/prophecy to the whole world of the transformation He is planning for it.

It will share what we already experience=> the freedom & abundant life of a right relationship with its Creator.

I would ask each of us directly, Are our lives a living sacrifice for X?

Are you living as if you were “first fruits,” holy unto the Lord?

Is there some service you can/should do for Him, as you carry on the normal affairs of your life?

Ultimately, we cannot present ourselves to God as *“first fruits,”* because our offering, like the Jew’s, must be presented by a priest—Jesus.

He must wash even our best works clean w/ His blood.
So, Xn friends, let's bring ourselves to our great H.P. saying to
Him, "Savior, take me in your nail-scarred hands & present
me to Your Father, because He is worthy of that as a
foretaste of the day when He will be all in all (I Cor 15:28).

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1. It isn't that God is good simply because He does such wonderful things for us; He is inherently good—by His very [14 nature] and character.
Jms 1:13
2. But Satan will seize every opportunity to raise doubts about the [20 goodness] of God's character when we are suffering trials.

[James 1:16]

In this morning's text, we will uncover five aspects of God's goodness/greatness...

*** God Is Generous**

[Verse 17a]

3. God's giving is good because He has a giving nature, He gives without ulterior motives, and He gives [24 generously].
Mt 5:45; 7:11; 6:25-26
4. Do you believe God gives you good and perfect gifts because He is your loving, generous Father? As a child of God, it's very [22 important] that you do.
Hosea 2:5, 8, 12; I Tim 6:17

*** God Is Transcendent**

[Verse 17b]

5. God is transcendent in that He is above and [14 beyond] us all.
Isa 55:9, 7; Gen 1:16
6. *“Father of the lights”* is an ancient Jewish title for God, because they reflect His [12 glory] as their Creator.
Psa 19:1; 136:7; I Jn 1:5; Lk 1:78-79; Rev 21:23; II Cor 4:6

*** God Is Unchanging**

[Verse 17c]

7. The moon goes through its cycle of phases about once a month; but these variations contrast with God, who [12 never] varies at all.
Mal 3:6; Ex 32:14

8. God is unchanging, so He will never go back on His [19 promises].

Rom 11:29; Heb 12:6

*** God Is Sovereign**

[Verse 18a]

9. God gave us birth spiritually, causing us to be become born again; and He did it by a sovereign act of His [10 will].

Eph 1:4-5; Jn 1:12-13

10. God's regenerating us is what [16 enabled] us to receive and believe in Christ.

Titus 3:5; Jn 3:4, 8; Eph 2:4-5

11. Until God (the Father of the lights) fathers him and "brings him forth," man cannot and [10 will] not become saved.

Heb 4:12

12. Only as the Holy Spirit prepares a person's heart does the scalpel of the Word do its two-edged [16 surgery] on that heart.

I Pet 1:23; Mk 4:20; Rom 10:17; Eph 1:13; Mt 7:7

*** God Is Worthy**

[Verse 18b]

13. James says Christians are God's first fruits today, His peculiar treasure; He takes particular delight in us as [10 holy] unto Him alone.

Rom 12:1; Phil 1:21; Rom 8:21-22

14. We are the "*first fruits*" of a harvest that is yet to be reaped, God's living proclamation and prophecy to the whole world of the transformation [6 He] is planning for it.

15. Let's bring ourselves to our great High Priest (Jesus) saying to Him, "Savior, take me in your nail-scarred hands and present me to Your Father because He is [14 worthy] of that."