

James 1:17 December 24, 2006

Alright good morning – and merry Christmas. I'm so glad that you and your families are here today. Let's go ahead and get our Bibles out and open to the book of James. James chapter 1.

For those of you who have not been here with us recently, we have been studying verse by verse through the letter of James. And I've got to say I'm excited about the verse we are looking at today. James has been tough. I don't know about you, but pretty much every week when we study this letter, I go home knowing I've got some work to do – some things to change – some attitudes or sins or apathy or selfishness or all kinds of things that God has targeted in my life through the truth of James.

This morning though in verse 17, we get some good news – some encouragement. But still in the context of what we have been studying. Let's recap together. Beginning in verse 12 of chapter 1 James wrote:

“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him.

When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me” for God cannot be tempted by evil nor does He tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires he is dragged away and enticed. Then when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin and sin when it is full grown gives birth to death.

Do not be deceived dear brothers.”

In verse 12 we came to understand that trials are meant to deepen and strengthen and grow our faith in God – that if our faith in God is genuine it will stand the test of any trial. Then in verse 13 we came to see that trials and temptation are different. Temptations are not meant to grow our faith but to destroy it and to make us ineffective in the Kingdom of God. And the difference between those two is simply how you and I respond.

As we looked at the past few verses we saw that we have no one to blame but ourselves for our own sinfulness. Certainly we can't blame God by saying “Well God created us and God made laws I can't keep and God allowed me to become the way I am and God put me in a situation where I can't control my behavior...” and blah blah blah. But what James says to us is God cannot have any part in our sinfulness – either directly or indirectly.

Still that is our nature – to blame God – even in some vague sense and to avoid our responsibility. So James clears it up in these verse that you can't blame anyone but yourself for your sin. In verse 13 he says the very nature of evil demonstrates that – God can't be tempted or tempt anyone else – God and evil are mutually exclusive.

And then in verse 14 it becomes clear that we have our problem. It is our nature. Man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own evil desires and enticed.

Then in verses 15-16 he talks about the nature of those desires. That evil desire brings forth sin and sin brings forth death. It begins in our emotion – in our desires – then moves to our minds and deceives us into thinking we have a right to what we want no matter how wrong – then it involves our will and we conceive and plan how to pull off the sin and then the end is when our behavior moves into disobedience – into sin.

So it isn't God – because God and evil are incompatible. The problem is the nature of man and in the nature of man the problem is our evil desires – our passion for that which is outside of God's will, God's timing, and God's glory.

And that brings us up to verse 17 where James says:

“Every good and perfect gift comes from above coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows.”

What I want to do this morning is to look at this verse in light of what we have been studying and then to look at it by itself and the incredible picture of God it paints.

And in light of what James has been teaching, here's the nature of God – here's the heart of the text. Hold onto this. **No one can blame God for sin because every good and every perfect gift is from above.**

The only things that come down from God are what? Are good and perfect. We possess a nature that gives rise to sin. God does not. The nature of God is such that it only produces good.

There's two sides to that. First – what its saying is that God could never produce sin. On the other it is saying that God is going to pour out good – good good good and more good so why in the world would you go after the baited hooks and the baited traps we talked about last week looking to be satisfied when God is pouring out everything you could ever use for all your satisfaction?

**God produces unending and unbounded good that makes a person a fool who would be tempted to be lured away to some baited hook or trap when all the goodness of God is available by His grace.**

Notice a few things about this verse.

First – in the NIV they condensed a little bit. There are actually two everys in this verse. Every good gift and every perfect gift comes down from above. Every, every. All inclusive, all inclusive. Everything.

Then notice the two gifts. Good gifts and perfect gifts. There are two different words used in Greek here. The first good gift is the word “**dosis**” and it actually means the act of giving. The other is the word “**dorema**” and it means the gift given.

So not only is every gift – everything actually given – perfect, but also the giving itself is good. **God never gives the wrong thing. God never gives at the wrong time. And God never gives in the wrong way.** Every act of giving and every gift given in the act of giving is good and perfect. Good means good. There's no comparative for it – it's not good, gooder, and goodest – it's just good – it's complete – it lacks nothing – it's all sufficient.

Now I know there are people here today who have a problem with that. And I want to acknowledge that pain. There are those who have been through trials that you still can't look back on and see what good came from them. When something unfortunate happens, we casually call it bad or evil because that is the way it appears to us. It is a problem or tragedy that cuts to the heart. In practice we tend to define “good” the same way we *think* God does and that God only wants “good thing” for us. We also demand to know the answer to any misfortune immediately. But patience is needed, for time is a potent tool in God's hands. **The stumbling block here is that in our arrogance and ignorance, we demand the right to define what “good” is. God's definition is often different from ours.** So we need wisdom and insight from Him in order to see the difficulties for what they are – and that's exactly what God promised us in verse 5 when James wrote, “if any of you lacks wisdom he should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to him.”

Back to verse 17 – every good and perfect gift is from above, **coming down from the Father of lights. That's a great statement. That was an ancient Jewish way of referring to God as creator.** The lights they would have had in mind are the sun, moon, and stars. Why does James choose that somewhat random title? Because it fits his illustration.

God is the Father of lights but with him there is no variation – no shifting shadow. **He is the one who created the heavenly bodies, but He is not like them.** They vary – they change – they dim – they brighten - they bring light – they cast shadow – they're here in the daytime, gone at night – here in the nighttime, gone in the day. Their benefit to us comes and goes. God isn't like that. **God's goodness and grace are no varying things.**

There are no days when He stops giving spiritual gifts. When his promises are on hold. There are not days when He stops giving spiritual light. A flow of good things from God never varies, never stops.

And let me just put it bluntly here folks – the fat fish takes no bait. If you're cashing in on your divine resources – what in the world would you want with the baited hook? Fill up on the divine gifts. The words to the old hymn:

Come thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace.

Streams of mercy – what? – Never ceasing – call for songs of loudest praise.

The streams of mercy never cease. Nothing can eclipse God's goodness. Nothing can stop His benevolence. Don't take the devil's bait. Don't get dragged away. Don't give birth to sin that could spell your own death. God gives good and only good because of Who He is and because He loves us. Who's responsible for sin? You are. And I am. **If you want to say no to temptation, what James is saying is get into touch with God's good giving of good gifts.**

Now let's look at the picture James paints of our incredible God. We'll go backward back through verse 17.

"He does not change like shifting shadows."

### **God is the Unchanging Lord.**

How different the light of God is than those heavenly lights he created. And even more – how different is our God than the world we live in. The world of man is utterly unstable. Whoever said the only constant is change wasn't kidding.

But God's light never wanes. He is perpetually the same. Though all creatures are subject to change, God is immutable. He has no beginning and no ending. He can know no change and is worthy of worship always. Three ways he is unchanging:

1) **God is unchanging in his being.** There are no mutations in God. There never was a time when he was not – there never will come a time when he shall cease to be. All that he is today he has ever been and ever will be. He says in Malachi 3:6 – I am the Lord and I change not.

Arthur Pink put it this way: "He cannot change for the better, for He is already perfect. And being perfect he cannot change for the worse. Altogether unaffected by anything outside of himself, improvement or deterioration is impossible. He is perpetually the same. He can only say "I am that I am."

2) **God is unchangeable in his attributes.** Whatever he was when he said, "Let there be light," he is exactly that today, and will remain so for ever. His power is unabated; his wisdom undiminished; his holiness unsullied. The attributes of God can no more change than God can cease to be. His truthfulness is immutable, because his word "stands firm in the heavens" (Psalm 119:89). He loves as much now as he did then; and when the light of the sun shall cease to shine, and moons stop showing their feeble light, he still shall love on for ever and ever. His love is eternal.

Take any one attribute of God, and I'll write on it - "always the same." Take any one thing you can say of God now, and it may be said not only in the dark past, but in the bright future. It shall always remain the same. "He does not change like shifting shadows."

3) And finally - **God is unchanging in his counsel.** Men's advice alters. They change their minds. They have new plans. They did not have the foresight to anticipate some things. They did not have the power to implement what they had in mind. God has no such problems. He is omniscient and omnipotent, so he has no need to revise his plans: Psalm 33:11 says "The plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations."

God does not change his relationship with us like shadows that shift or he would have consumed us long ago when he got angry with our behavior. But God had determined he would save us and take us to heaven: he had made up his mind and he does not change.

Lets go back a phrase in verse 17 – “coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.”

### **God is the Omnipotent Creator.**

God is the Father of the heavenly lights. In the beginning God said, "Let there be light. And there was light." Then we are told, "God made two great lights - the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night." (Genesis 1:16). Then the writer of Genesis immediately adds, almost incidentally, these words, "He also made the stars".

Think of the implications of that! The vastness of space and the innumerable stars, some of whom we know about because of the slightest sounds coming from the edges of the universe picked up by radio telescopes. With no effort at all God spread them all through the heavens. He is the Father of the heavenly lights. They are created by him for the good of all men. As 'signs' they will point to the living God exclusively. Psalm 19:3-4 says “Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the end of the world.”

Don't be overwhelmed by the immensity of space. Though the twinkling lights are billions of miles from us, and are even getting further away while each moment passes, they, like us, were fashioned by our Father. That God, who hung the lights of heaven in their places, so far apart from each other, has set eternity in our hearts. He has come near to us in his Son Jesus Christ – which leads us to the last or rather first phrase in verse 17.

“Every good and perfect gift comes from above.”

### **God is unendingly generous.**

It is not simply that God gives gifts to all men but that the Christian can say, "God is in love with me, and so he has imputed my guilt to his holy Son and not spared him from the anathema of Calvary only because he had eternally set his love upon me." "Come to me and I will give you rest," says the Lord Jesus (Matthew 11:28). What a rest! He gives forgiveness of my sins, and reconciliation with the God who loves me. He gives me the righteousness of Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the adoption of sonship, the inheritance of the saints and the hopes of heaven. Romans 6:23 says “The gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord”.

This is where the Christian life begins, in a gift from God, and such a gift - the Creator of all, the one in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge - and he's mine: the one who is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person - and he's mine: the good Shepherd: my prophet, priest and king: the one who has no restrictions, and no boundaries save his own determination and purpose - he is given to me! He plants his footsteps in the seas for me, and rides upon the storms as he comes to me. He nourishes and cherishes me. He comes to me in my loneliness and spreads a table for me in the presence of my enemies. He fills my cup to overflowing. When the Christian looks back he says, “Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life.” When he looks ahead he says, “And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” Facing the future the Christian has strong hopes and a single vision, because God promises that the flood of these good and perfect gifts will never end. "Streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise."

### **And it all began with Christmas.**

Isaiah 9:6 “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

Matt 1:21 “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

2 Cor 1:20 “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.”

He is the greatest of the good gifts of a good God. John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.”

God is unendingly generous – and it is his gift – not the wrapped boxes under the tree – that Christmas is all about.

This morning James gives us another reason why we cannot escape the responsibility of our sin. And in doing so he reveals the very goodness of the nature of our God. **Because this Christmas and always, how you think about God is the most important thing about you.**

Will you pray with me – to the giver of every good gift - the Father of Lights – to the God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever?