

# Every Good Gift

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[ 0 : 00 ] Now for those of you who weren't here last week, we started a new series in the book of James, which will take us through to Easter. James is a very popular book with ordinary Christians. That's because it's very direct and practical and concise and full of wonderful imagery, some of it in our passage this evening. Now the practical nature of this book, the idea of being doers of the world and not just hearers of the world, makes sense when you think about who James was.

James' mum and dad was Mary and Joseph. James was the half-brother of Jesus. So growing up with Jesus didn't obviously have much of an impact on him immediately.

And when Jesus started his ministry, James initially thought Jesus was crazy. It was only after the resurrection that James came to faith. We read about that in 1 Corinthians 15 where Jesus specifically pays James a visit.

So remarkably, James grew up with Jesus and he saw Jesus sort of doing these amazing things at some point when Jesus began doing this amazing ministry. He saw Jesus doing amazing things, saying amazing things, no impact on him.

[ 1 : 12 ] Which is why after coming to faith, James speaks out against wishy-washy superficial faith. He talks against that kind of life because he lived that kind of life.

He preaches against self-deception because he was deceived himself for so long. So let's get into it. James 1, 9 to 18.

You'll find in this book it would seem that the author switches topics rather abruptly. But there's always a link. And in this case, the link from last week to this week is trials.

So from last week's sermon, James sort of kicks off his letter with these amazing words. Let me remind you, 2, 3, and 4. So James is saying the goal is Christian maturity and that's produced by persevering through trials.

In this week's passage, James gives us a cracker of example. The trials of poverty and the trials of wealth. Verses 9 and 10 first.

[ 2 : 30 ] Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation and the rich in his humiliation. So we have these two people.

Brothers or sisters in the original Greek. One is poor, one is rich. They represent two circumstances of life. And in both of them there are trials and temptations.

And James says this wild thing. He says that the poor person should boast. Which is a striking word. Boast in his exaltation. And the rich should boast in humiliation.

What's sort of going on here? Well, the poor person first. I've lived in a few houses. A couple of houses which made room. They were like community houses that made room for people that were on the margins.

And safe houses for people that probably couldn't. Would struggle to find a place to live. Or would struggle to find people that wanted to be with them for any significant time. And I lived with a guy for a little while who was a refugee.

[ 3 : 35 ] And with post-traumatic stress. And he told me once after moving to Canada. After I got to know him a little bit. He would say, you know, I just walked down the street and no one looks at me anymore.

No one looks at me in the eye. They look away when they see me. And he goes, I feel like a, I'm not human. Because I feel like a dog. I feel like an animal. And that's the thing about poverty and displacement.

They can rob you of dignity and hope and joy. It doesn't always, but it can. So it makes sense that when the gospel comes with power to the marginalized.

You know, the message that you are a child of God. That there's more to life than this. That you can dare to hope. I mean, that's a message worth celebrating. That's worth boasting about. What about this rich one, though?

That's kind of a confusing one, I think. The rich person here is a Christian. It's not saying poor, good, rich, bad. The rich person is a Christian who has been humiliated.

[ 4 : 36 ] And it says that they should celebrate this. But why would you celebrate that? Firstly, wealth in biblical terms. Christianly thinking. Well, it's not bad, according to the Bible.

It's all about how it's acquired. How it's used. And what it does to your heart. And what can it do to your heart? Well, it can possess it. Money is magnetic and insistent.

And it can ruin you. It can. It doesn't have to, but it can. It can lie to you. It can say that you are secure. That nothing bad can happen.

Odious lie of that you are more important than others. So when the gospel comes in a powerful way to us who trust in money, it can humiliate us in a wonderful way.

Because it breaks through those lies. And it breaks that weld. And it says, you can't actually put your trust in the security of this world. Because it fades away. And the way James does that is he brings the facade of wealth to the stark reality of our own mortality.

[ 5 : 52 ] For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass. Its flowers fall and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich fade away in the midst of their pursuits.

So in some so far, whether you are lowly or have significant status, this is saying don't believe the lies that the world will tell you.

That you are nothing. Or you are everything. Don't believe those lies. Rather develop the eternal perspective. Because that's where the freedom is. And this is what the passage is pointing to. I'll learn more about that surely.

Next, James goes back to verse 12, which is a bit of a summary verse here. Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial. These trials we're talking about. Remains steadfast under trial. For when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Now do you see there's a bit of a cycle there? There's trial, trial, perseverance, life.

[ 6 : 54 ] Trial, perseverance, life. So the eternal perspective helps us in the midst of that trial. I was a staff meeting a couple of weeks ago.

A staff member said, you know, my life is pretty good, but if everything went sideways really quickly, and if my life remained terrible for the rest of my life, but I got to spend eternity with God, that's the eternal perspective, if I got to spend eternity with God, it would still be a pretty good deal.

You might think, well, that's just unrealistic. That's just silly. That's just kind of like a silly thing to say for kind of an educated, Caucasian, middle-class North American.

I don't know. Maybe, maybe not. But there are certainly Christians in the world, particularly those in impoverished countries, who suffer under enormous hardship, and they will never receive justice in their lifetime.

But they can count on eternity with God. And so they can persevere, and they can trust, and they can remarkably find joy in their circumstances.

[ 8 : 07 ] So this eternal perspective is very important for us, particularly us in a culture that is so immediate. I find microwaves.

Like, I get impatient with my microwave, and I'm microwaving my daughter's milk, and it feels like it's like 30 seconds, and I try and pull it back to 28 seconds sometimes, and I feel like it's stealing my life.

You know, like it's taken from me so much. So I think it's a wonderful thing to pray in your life. God, give me an eternal perspective so I can persevere.

And perhaps it's a radical departure for you in your prayers, because I know my prayers are normally about, I want results. I want results now. I want heaven now. Father, help me to see from your perspective.

Moving on, 13 to 16. So, so far, James has said this. Well, let me read this passage first. Let no one say when he is tempted, I'm being tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

[ 9 : 19 ] But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters. So, so far, James has said this. He says trials can be blessings.

They can lead us to maturity, because when we have an eternal perspective, when we have God's perspective, we learn to trust in God in the midst of difficulties, in the midst of trials and temptations, which is the same word in Greek, trials and temptations.

That makes sense, I think. But it's important to realize that the trials and the temptations themselves, they, the power to change us is not in them.

It all depends on our response. Trial. Perseverance. Perseverance. Life. Now, do you see what I just read before, right?

[10:22] There's another cycle that James introduces. So there's trial, perseverance, life, but there's trial. There's sin. There's death. So, how do we face our trials, our temptations?

Do we persevere? Do we give in? And when giving in, do we shift responsibility? Because we do have an amazing capacity to do that, I think.

To try and work out a way how to blame someone else for our problems. I'm being tempted by God. I'm looking at pornography because my wife is annoying me. My life is hard. I'm so angry all the time. That's why I'm angry all the time, because my life is hard.

I have this propensity for addiction or sin because this or that happened in my life. It's God's fault. Now, certainly, people have valid reasons to feel ripped off by life.

[11:28] Absolutely, of course. In the context of what James is saying here, he's saying, look, if you fail the trial that's before you, it's not God's fault.

The fault? The fault's in your heart. God doesn't put trials before you to cause you to sin. He puts trials before you so that you'll grow, so that you'll be mature.

Verse 17, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there's no variation or shadow due to change. Of his own will, that's great out of his own will. He brought us forth by the word of truth that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. So what about you? As you think about your life and your track record and facing temptation, I wonder if it all feels a little bit hopeless sometimes.

Perhaps when you think back, you see a lot of failure, not a lot of high points. We want to be mature Christians though, right? I certainly do. We want to persevere through trials.

[12:49] We want to receive the crown of life promised here. And we've just read that the difference between failure and success, it's not God's fault. It's in our hearts. So we need a trusting heart to walk in to the life that God promises.

But what do we bring? Fickle hearts. Muddied hearts. Foul hearts. That's a big problem, isn't it? That's my problem.

That's your problem. Now there is a solution to this, a wonderful, incredible solution. But God takes responsibility for this.

verses 17 and 18. Let me read it to you again. It's so wonderful. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights from whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

It's saying here that God is an amazing giver. He's an amazing giver and he never changes.

Specifically, the gift he gives us is a new start. Now the idea of a new start is talked about in lots of different ways in the Bible.

[14:02] It's talked about as being a new heart, a new creation, being born again. You've probably heard those phrases. But here James talks about how God brought us forth. This is sort of conception language, right?

He says, you can start again. I'll give you a fresh start. And he does this through the word of truth, through his gospel, which we're talking about here. So God gives us a fresh start, which means that he underwrites all of your terrible decisions with this amazing gift of grace.

And because he's an unchanging God, it says in verse 18 here, it means he'll never go back on that decision. So we've come here this evening, we've come to the service, and we've brought with us the decisions we've made this week.

How we're faced various trials and temptations. And perhaps you've made good ones. That's awesome. Your perseverance has led you to greater maturity.

But perhaps you didn't make good decisions this week. Well, you need to know that you are still part of God's family. It says that this will happen because of God's will.

[ 15 : 15 ] Do you remember I pointed that out in the passage? It was God's choice to bring you into his family. Do you think he's going to leave it up to you to mess it up?

No. You have no more to do with your rebirth than you did your natural birth. You can no more claim sort of participation in the latter than you can the former.

You're part of God's family. He hasn't changed his mind about you. And this wonderful gift he offers you, this fresh start, is the gift of forgiveness and newness.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.  
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