

Text James 1:16-18

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. ¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.^[d] ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Main Point

The Everlasting Goodness of God in Your Trial

Introduction (300)

Hook

Have you ever made a wrong conclusion and made a complete embarrassment of yourself?

Have you ever felt hurt and confused when your friends seem to be ignoring you, keeping a secret from you, and appear to be making plans that exclude you?

And maybe you even confronted them and asked them “why are you excluding me?” Why are you being so mean?”

Only to find out that they were planning a surprise party for you? Your friends do love you and care for you, and in their hope to show that to you, you had made a completely wrong conclusion.

Slightly embarrassing, slightly humiliating, but no harm done.

Link to passage

But there are some wrong conclusions which have far greater consequences, conclusions that lead to death and Today I want us to think about a conclusion with such a consequences.

This evening, as we study through these three verse in James 1, we are reminded of how easily we are **tempted to doubt the goodness of God.**

Trials happen, and we are quick to reach the wrong conclusions. We are quick to conclude, in our hearts, that God is not Good.

This is a serious matter and so James, warns us and helps us. He reminds us of **The Everlasting Goodness of God in your Trial.**

Regardless of what we face we must not doubt the goodness of God.

Outline

This main idea, **The Everlasting Goodness of God in Your Trial**, we will develop in three parts:

What is God like in Your Trial? (v16)

What is God like in His Word? (v17)

What is God like in His Work? (v18)

Part 1 – What is God like in your trial

Exposition

Text Background

So let us begin with part 1. What is God like in your trial?

Our passaged begins with “*Do not be deceived*” . But what are we to not be deceived about?

You will remember James is talking to Christians who are suffering. They are in the midst of trials.

James has been explaining that their trials, just like our trials, are designed by God to grow us and change us, and make us more like Christ.

The trials are there so that we might become perfect in our imitation of Christ.

The trial reveals what is the desire of our heart. And that evil desire leads to sinful action which ultimately leads to death.

Last week we dealt with the idea of who is responsible for Sin. We made a distinction between the external trial and the internal temptation.

God is not the author of our internal temptation! That comes out of our sinful heart. The very thing God is trying to change.

James warns us to take responsibility for our sinful desires and actions, and deal with them because Sin has deadly consequence.

James makes the final outcome clear in verse 15:

¹⁵ Then [evil] desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (Jas 1:15)

Do not be deceived

And it is at this point that James says:

¹⁶ Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. (v16)

We are easily deceived! We need to listen to what he is saying carefully.

He is not talking of ignorance, of lack of education or of misunderstanding here.

James is saying don't deceive yourself. Don't be self-deceived. Don't willingly believe a lie. Don't give yourself the permission to believe something because it is convenient or because it "feels" right.

Two things are particularly on James mind that he warns us about self-deception.

Deceived about source of sin

One is referring to what he has just been talking about.

The source of sin and temptation.

We are quick to attribute blame for our sin to others. "he made me angry" , "She makes me anxious" Or even to God. "He set this situation up and I had no choice"

But we cannot say that. You became angry because there is anger inside you. You became anxious because there is fear inside you.

The responsibility of our sin lies in our soul.

Not with our circumstances, not with our biology, not with God and not with Satan. We are responsible for our sin.

When we take responsibility for our sin, instead of being the victim, it pushes us to repentance and it pushes us to our redeemer.

If we don't deal with sin as it needs to be dealt with, sin will lead to death.

So do not be deceived about the source of your sin! If you continue in your self-deception, this will lead to death! But this was developed last week, so we will leave it there for now.

Deceived about the source of Good and the nature of God

The second thing James does not want us to be deceived about is the Goodness of God. This is what is developed in verses 17-18. (as we will see)

We must not allow ourselves to believe that God is in any way evil, or cruel, or mean. This seems to be part of what it means to stay "steadfast" in the trial, as verse 12 encourages us to do. To be steadfast in our faith in God.

So why does James make such a big point to warn us about doubting God's goodness?

Because that is the first thing that comes to mind as soon as we are hit by a trial.

- How could God let this happen to me?
- If God is Good, he would never have brought this to me.

- God must not care about me since this is happening.

Every complaint, reveals you are doubting God's goodness.

We are so quick to doubt God's goodness.

Illustration - Mark 4

In the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Mark we are told an account that illustrates this self deception perfectly.

In verse 35 we read of Jesus telling his disciples that they are all going to the other side of the sea of Galilee. Which begins the account of Jesus calming the storm.

You know how the story goes.

As they are sailing or rowing across the sea, a great windstorm comes upon them. Huge waves. Gales of wind. They feel tiny and vulnerable. Life becomes very simple very quickly. Survival is the only thing on their minds.

But then the storm got so bad, and the boat was taking in so much water that the disciples knew they were going to die. They just knew it. That was it. The storm was going to overwhelm them and they would die.

Notice what they say to Jesus after they finally wake him:

*"Teacher, **do you not care** that we are perishing?"*

In the midst of the storm. When they believe they are going to die, they question whether or not Jesus cares for them. They question his goodness towards them.

Application

Your reaction in the storm

What a true picture that paints!

We all face trials, we all face storms.

And that question is quick to come in our hearts, if not to our lips:

*“God, **do you not care** that we are perishing?”*

- My child is sick – Do you not care?
- My boss hates me. – Do you not care?
- My business is failing. – Do you not care?
- I’m going to be late for my flight – Do you not care?
- I have no friends – Do you not care?

What do you believe God is like when you face your trial?

- That God does not care?
- That he is unwilling?
- That he is unable?
- That he is playing Games with you?

Do not let yourself be self-deceived

Measure of Goodness

You see measure His goodness against our own. We measure goodness by our warped measuring stick of good.

We conclude that what is happening to us is not good; therefore, the source of it must also not be good.

How pathetically arrogant, yet that is the reality of our heart.

And so, we must not be deceived.

To be deceived will lead to death. Verse 15 makes that clear. This is the deception that Adam and Eve believed when they first sinned. This is the deception that drives our sinful behaviour. This is the very deception we are being redeemed from through the trial.

Link

Thankfully James does not just tell us to not be deceived.

He reminds us the character of God in verse 17 and then one specific work of God in vs 18.

Which brings us to our second section: “What is God like in his word?”.

Part 2 – What is God like in His Word

Exposition

Good gifts – As defined By God

Look at verse 17 again:

¹⁷ Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.^[d]

First off we are reminded that everything good comes from Him. There is nothing good that happens to us that is not from God.

But, as we have said before, our definition of good is not God’s definition. This is crucial to get our heads around.

We cannot say “everything that makes me happy is from God, and everything that causes me trouble must have some other source.” That is not what James is getting at.

It is much simpler than that. Let me put it this way:
Everything that happens to you is a good gift from God.

Think of Romans 8:28-29 which picks up the same theme. In the midst of suffering Paul says:

*²⁸ And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good,**^[h] [All things are God’s good and perfect gifts] for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined [And here we have the description of the good, from God’s perspective. What is the good?] to be **conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

Our “good” is to be conformed to the image of Christ, in order to love him at a greater capacity.

That is what James is getting at. Even the trials are good and perfect gifts given for our good.

We have got to bear in mind that God has a greater good for us than we could ever imagine. Our own picture of good is too small.

We are being transformed to be like the perfect human, Jesus Christ, so that we can worship God perfectly, fulfilling our ultimate purpose which will bring us the greatest joy.

That is true goodness.

That is true happiness.

That is truly a good gift.

Father of Light No change

James then moves our attention from the gifts to the Giver.

Notice in the end of verse 17 God is described as *the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*^[d]

God created the heavens and the earth. He created the sun, moon and stars. But as awe inspiring as the sun, moon and stars are, they change and they vary. God does not change.

He is unchanging.

The same God who was with Noah, David and Daniel is with you.

- The moon waxes and wanes.
- The stars “wander” according in their paths.
- The sun changes heat with the seasons
- and even get’s eclipsed every now and then.

These seemingly “constants of life” have been worshiped over the ages.

But God is unchanging. More than that it is impossible for him to change.

The compassion, care and protection God showed in the past describes the same God we worship today!

He has not grown old or weary! He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Application

God is worthy in the trial

And also thinking closer to home, He is the same God who gave you breath. The same God who provides food for your belly and the same God who enables you to do your work.

You must not fall trap of doubting God's goodness when a trial hits after affirming his goodness in a time of plenty and peace.

He is unchanging and therefore entirely trustworthy.

Even in the trial, especially in the trial, He is worthy of: Love, Trust, and Expectation

He is worthy of worship.

We can turn to God in the trial

Let the truth of the Word counter what your feelings may be telling you.

Even in the midst of deep suffering, Jesus always turned to God in prayer.

Even in the darkest psalms, we read how the afflicted turned to God in prayer and worship.

In the same way, when we are hit by a trial we remember that he is creator of all things, the giver of good gifts, and does not change.

He is our good God in the trial in whom we trust.

Link

And James does not remain generic in reminding us of God's goodness. He turns to a specific example of

God's goodness. One that is incredibly personal to each of us.

James points us to the Work God has accomplished in you.

Which brings us to our third and final point.

Part 3 – What is God like in his work

Exposition

Brought us fourth

Look at verse 18 again.

¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Often we can look at creation, and at the majestic works of God in history, and we can fully accept that God is powerful and wise and he can do whatever he wants.

But sometimes we wonder if God is really willing. Sure, he could work for my good, but does he want to? Does he really want what is best for me?

In this verse, we are reminded that, YES, God wants your good.

God's goodness towards you is declared in your salvation.

Look again at the beginning of the verse:

Of his own will he brought us forth

The word “Brought us forth” is birth language. By God’s will we were brought into life. He was **willing** to bring us from death to life.

In his wisdom, He conceived a plan which would save you from the clutches of Sin, a plan that would rescue us from death.

But this plan was no academic exercise, nor did it simply cost him time and money. No his plan to save us cost him his son. He had to see his son slandered, tortured and murdered in order to give you life.

Yet he still chose to do that.

He was willing to do that.

It was within his power and he was willing.

Friends, when we doubt God’s goodness, when we doubt his willingness to give us good gifts, we have forgotten the gospel, We have forgotten how he has given us his Son to rescue us from the torments of hell.

So when a trial hits, and doubt does start creeping in, when you find yourself wondering if God really has your best interest at heart: remember the cross, remember the nails, remember the lashes, remember what he has already done for you remember his willingness to save you.

By the word of truth

Does the trial always make sense? No.

Do we always understand why we are going through these trials? No.

Do we always see the good that comes out of the trial? No, not always, on this side of heaven.

Is the pain real despite knowing God is at work? Yes. The pain is real. In fact the psalms give us words to speak these pains, while still trusting the goodness of God.

Does it feel like folly to be going through these trials? From a human perspective it often does.

But then that is how God works. That is how he has chosen to work.

How did God bring you from death to life? *by the word of truth*. See that in verse 18.

Even as we think of the preaching of the Gospel, the very thing that gave us new birth, **this** is foolishness from a human perspective.

Think of 1 Cor 1:18:

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

The very thing that calls us to him is considered foolishness to the natural man.

Should we be surprised that the thing that is **transforming** us also feels like foolishness?

From a human perspective all trials seem pointless and foolish, but foolishness turns into a glorious work of grace.

Just like the folly of the cross becomes the power of God to save, the “foolishness” of suffering turns into the power of God to transform us into the likeness of his son!

God’s ways are not our ways, but his ways are always good!

Link

But James goes one step further as he want's to remove any doubt of God's goodness in our hearts.

Not only was God willing to give up his son, Not only are his ways not our ways, but he also reminds us who we are to God.

He tells us that we are a kind of first fruit.

First fruit

Now to us, being called "first fruit" does not hold much meaning.

But you will remember that the first-fruit in ancient Israel held special significance. It was the first portion of the crop which was to be set apart for God. The first-fruit designates the best of the crop and anticipates a full future harvest.

Now James says that his listeners are a "kind of first fruit" which gives us a bit of space to figure out what he wants us to understand.

But the bottom line is that he want's us to marvel at the goodness of God.

He could be talking about the work of regeneration and sanctification which are only the first stages of a work that is to be completed in glory.

And so in the face of doubting God's goodness, we should recognise that even the glorious work of regeneration and sanctification are but a taste (a first-fruit) of the future glory we will experience.

Or James, when referring to first-fruit, could be meaning specifically the Christians James is talking to in his letter. They are the first of a larger harvest of Christians that was to come. And so the knowledge that they are part of a bigger plan, that God will save others, and he will use these trials to do His work, gives hope and purpose.

Or, thirdly and finally, James could be using “first fruit” to designate those who are precious to God. I think this fits well with the flow of what James is saying.

God’s chosen people are precious to Him. They are the cream of the crop. Christians are the best of the harvest.

You are not some number to fill a quota. Not just a cog in a big machine. You are the *firstfruits of his creatures*.

And this fits well, as James wants to push away any doubt of the Goodness of God in our hearts.

When you are in the midst of the trial and you start to doubt the goodness of God, remember that you are part of those set apart to God. You are his redeemed people. You are his preeminent ones. You are his first-fruit.

And let that, too, drive away any doubt about the Goodness of God.

Conclusion

As we bring our study to a close, we see that in these few verses James warns us of reaching wrong conclusions when we are in the trial.

Yes the trial is real.

Yes the trial is painful.

Yes the trial seems endless.

But we must not deceive ourselves and doubt God's goodness. Our hearts are quick to go there. Our lips are quick to form those words.

But we do not know what is truly good. He defines good. He is the giver of good gifts.

He always has, and always will be the giver of good gifts for his people. He does not change over time.

He is not only able to pursue our good, he is willing to pursue our good. He showed his willingness by giving us his Son, by bring us from death to life.

That which seemed foolishness produced glory. That which seemed futile brought forth life.

He brought us from death to life, through the word of truth in order that we would be the precious ones in his sight.

Yes, even in the midst of the trial, God is Good.

Let us pray