

# Guest Preacher

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Can we turn for a short while to the passage that we were reading together? The letter of James chapter 1.

We can read again at verse 16. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 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.

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.

I'm sure you're all familiar with the writing of the Apostle James.

It may not be a book that we go to often, because it is not a book that leaves us comfortable at times.

[ 1 : 0 9 ] Some people say the best word to describe the epistle of James is practical.

It's a practical book. A practical letter. Think of this Martin Luther that was reputed to have said that it was a right-stroy epistle.

And the reason he called it a right-stroy epistle was Martin Luther was somebody who was originally a practicing Roman Catholic and who depended upon his salvation being the consequence of his works.

He worked out a salvation. And he thought that was the way everybody should do it. That the harder you worked, the more diligent you were doing what God told you to do in his word, then the more godly you were and the more certain you were of your salvation.

Until he discovered that no matter how hard he tried, he could never be diligent enough.

[ 2 : 3 3 ] He could never work hard enough. He could never climb the ladder high enough in order to attain salvation. So he discovered the gospel.

And whenever he discovered the gospel, he discovered that Christ had done everything for him. And because of that discovery, when he discovered the epistle of James and read it, he thought James was placing too much emphasis on doing, on works.

But I think that was a misunderstanding. I don't know if he continued to misunderstand what James had to say. Probably not. But James does put a lot of emphasis on the works that a person who believes in Christ should be doing.

James Montgomery Boyce writes that it is a most neglected book because of the emphasis the apostle places on works.

And I think what he says is James speaks about wealth and what we should be doing with our wealth. He speaks about how we use our wealth.

[ 4 : 0 1 ] He speaks about our friends, who they are and who they should be and who they shouldn't be. He speaks about those who gossip and the wrongness of that.

He speaks about hypocrisy and the evil of hypocrisy. He speaks about how we make our friends and whether we choose them wisely enough.

All of that you'll find in the epistle in one way, shape or form. And for that reason, when a Christian reads the epistle, sometimes he finds that the apostle is pointing the finger at the things that he's not doing.

Or the things that they are doing that they shouldn't be doing. He's very, very challenging as the writer of God's word.

You know, in this chapter that we read, we saw there that he mentioned, for example, heaven speaks about the believer's right to heaven.

[ 5 : 19 ] He doesn't ignore that. But I'm sure if you and I were going to have a conversation tonight, that you would be happy enough to speculate about what you are going to be doing when you get to heaven, if you intend to go there.

And it's safe territory for your speculation. Because you haven't yet gone there. And not many people know what's going to be going on there when you do get there, apart from what the word of God reveals.

But then, it's not as easy for you to talk about your shortcomings, my shortcomings as a Christian believer in the here and now.

To speak about the things that we are leaving undone. To speak about our prayers or lack of them.

To speak about our listening to the gospel and the failure to apply the gospel that we're listening to.

[ 6 : 34 ] That's the challenge that James brings to those who read his epistle. He challenges every one of us so that we're not just hear us of God's word, but do us of God's word.

So in that sense, many consider James to be too direct. And maybe we can read him occasionally, but not too often.

Because he disturbs our nest. Well, here, at this point, in the epistle, he mentions temptation.

He says in verse 14, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, give birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, brings forth death.

And then verse 16 is really what's described as a link verse. It links in what James is now going to talk about with what has been said before and what he is going to address at this point.

[ 7 : 53 ] He doesn't want anyone to be deceived about the origin of temptation, to misconstrue where temptation originates from.

Nor does he want anybody to be deceived about the origin of every good gift, the best gift, the best of gifts.

Whoever we recognize is the source, that source, is God. He may use a medium, he may use a means, he may use something that is less obvious, but at its heart is God.

The best things that we enjoy from life is from God. And that is what he wants us to understand.

He is the source of all that is good, a benevolence that is entirely undeserved. So I want us to look at the words of verse 17 in particular and verse 18.

[ 9 : 10 ] And when we look at these words, every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to turning, due to change.

I automatically go back to the authorized version, due to change. And what he is wanting us to understand is all to do with the best of things that we enjoy in this world that we attribute the source as God.

Now there's three obvious, I suppose, obvious to some many, understandings of the words that we have there at the beginning of verse 17.

The first possibility is all God's gifts are good. Or the second one is all good gifts are from God.

And the third one is a possibility all giving is good but only what is from above is perfect. Now these are three possibilities that are suggested by various sources.

[ 10 : 48 ] And you can see that they're quite similar but not the same. And I would say that each one of them has merit but they are not precise enough in expressing the meaning that is at the heart of what the apostle is wanting us to understand.

And I think what he wants us to appreciate is understanding first and foremost setting this baseline anything that is good God is its author.

God is his source. The best of things that we enjoy in life God provides it. It's a simple truth because he's going to move on to a greater truth to speak about a greater gift but he wants us to understand this as a basic premise that we can appreciate before we get to think about the gospel and that is that everything that comes our way from God is at its heart a gift.

Why would we say that it is a gift? Well, if you're a Christian you know that there is nothing that you receive from God that you deserve.

Because every one of us we are told by the scripture emphatically all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God and as a consequence of our sin, as a consequence of our fallenness, as a consequence of our actions by reason of our sinfulness, there is nothing that we do that can do anything other than cause the displeasure of God.

[ 13 : 01 ] It's a fatal mistake on the part of anyone to think that they are able to do something that will in some way bring the pleasure of God their direction.

We cannot do anything that will create brownie points or merit that we can present to God. That's the bottom line.

Humanly speaking, we don't believe that. Humanly speaking, we're in conflict with what God's word tells us because God's word says, we have all sinned and come short of the glory of God.

That coming short, it's as if, that's just one expression of it. God is saying to us, there's the target.

Hit the target and you will receive the benefit of my favor. He doesn't really say that, but it is as if he's saying that.

[ 14 : 12 ] There is the line that you've got to reach. There is the point that is set before you. Strive to get to there and you'll be satisfied.

You'll satisfy God. Well, he doesn't say that because he knows that by saying that he would suggest that that was something that was possible.

And it's not. It's impossible. impossible. And because it is impossible and because what we deserve is God's displeasure, God's anger, God's holy wrath, God turning on us rather than turning to us with favor.

God's favor. So if we receive good from his hands, and we do, then what are we receiving? We are receiving something that we have not earned.

We are receiving something that we have not contributed to by way of merit. I think in our day and generation, it is harder for men and women to accept a gift.

[ 15 : 28 ] Because there is always the desire to respond in kind. If somebody gives you a gift, well, what do you want in return? No, it's a gift.

I'm giving it to you. It's yours. But there's a suspicion. That gift must have something attached to it.

Surely you want payment. Surely you want me to do something in return. I don't know, maybe I'm wrong. Maybe I'm looking at society with eyes that are blinded by my own interest in the Bible and what it says.

But I think the Bible is telling us something about what a gift is. A gift is something that we give freely, not expecting anything in return.

A past generation were used enough to having neighbors and friends and family do things for them because they were friends and family and neighbors.

[ 16 : 35 ] And the only thing that they would do in return would be what they could, if they could, and it didn't worry them if they never could, because the exchange mechanism was such that that was the way it was.

of the gift. There's been a creeping in a certain direction where we fail to understand that at the heart of what a gift is, is the understanding that the giver is bestowing something without expectation of remuneration or reward.

And if we intend our gift to be reciprocated with another gift, then it's not a gift. It stopped becoming a gift.

Perhaps you've got a cupboard full of chocolates like we have. I enjoy chocolates. I've got a whole pile of them after Christmas. Christmas. And I'll enjoy eating them eventually.

And they were all given freely, and they weren't expecting return, I hope, because many of them didn't get a return. But they were given.

[ 17 : 52 ] They were gifts. Now, what the apostle is saying here, he is in receipt of God's goodness, something that he could not, and was incapable of making God give to him, because of anything that he did or said himself.

And look at the way he describes it. I think that this description here, every good gift, every perfect gift, is from above.

Why does he feel the need to emphasize that? The good gift and the perfect gift. Because I think he wants to emphasize what I've been saying, that unlike some gifts, this gift is a good gift, it's a perfect gift, not just because of its source, although that's incredibly important, present, but because of the fact that it is not something that is given so that we can give in return.

But I think the emphasis is we receive from him out of his perfections. gifts. And I think that description, every gift, every good gift, every perfect gift, coming down from the father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

I've often wondered about that picture. why does he use this image?

[ 19 : 51 ] Why does he describe God, the father of lights? He could use any number of God's names, and there's plenty of them, but this is the name that he gives to him.

I think one reason is that he wants us to contemplate and to focus upon the source of the gift that he's going to talk about, more specifically.

The father of lights. It contains an element of mystery. The source of all gifts, as we said, is God, and the resource is inexhaustible because of who he is.

no matter how many draw upon it. It remains the same. It's a resource that is never spent.

The many things that we are told about resources in the world that they're not meant to last, that there will come a time when they will be spent.

[ 21 : 10 ] Even the sun, the moon, the stars, all of these things will diminish. The minister I had as a young, young Christian, when he went to his first communion in Skye, the old minister who was there was a man called Mr.

Mackay, who was in Brackadale. and I remember our own minister Mr. Madison telling me, oh he said he was so good to me.

He was so good to me. He was asking me, now he said have you got this and have you got that? And he said I was doing the Lord's table and he was saying to me, what are you going to give them at the Lord's table?

and he gave me, he said, he gave me, he said just talk to them about Joseph. Tell them about Joseph. Tell them to reach Joseph.

He just said the storehouses of Joseph are always full. They're never empty. The Joseph of the New Testament. I always remember the delight he took in telling me that story and how practical the old minister was in wanting to support a man newly ordained to the ministry and wanting to ensure that he wouldn't go without.

[ 22 : 41 ] But the Joseph that is spoken of here, the store houses that are spoken of here are always full. That is the image that is meant to be conveyed, the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

The sun is perishing. None of us are going to see that happen unless something dramatic happens. But we're told that it is being exhausted and that many other sources of energy are being spent as they're being used or as they're being with the passage of time.

The source is not. He is the father of lights, all light. He is, God is light and he is the source of all light and as such, like the inexhaustible source that he is, it will never, he will never run out.

He will never have anything other than the fullness, the copious amount that he always possesses so that those who go to him will always find that he is ready to give and having given he will give some more.

And every Christian here tonight will know that even though they think themselves to have spent their, their, well, you know, they've, they've, they've gone wrong so often, they've done wrong so often, they've, they've failed to, to fulfill their, their, potential as Christians and they feel that, well, at some point God is going to say enough is enough and he will withdraw his pleasure and that is not so because of the fact that his love for his own is inexhaustible and it is a love that is like he is, an ongoing it is, it is created in himself and recreated in himself but it will not in any way fade.

[ 25 : 03 ] One thing I'm sure of and we'll move on quickly is that of all the apostles, all the apostles, James is, I think, reading, reading Paul, I know that Paul may have had some contact with the teachings of the Lord Jesus, not like the disciples because he was a late arrival on the scene, but of all the apostles, of all the disciples, James appears to be the one who remembers most of what he heard sitting at the feet of Jesus because reading through his epistle what you'll find is that he is very often referring to what he heard the Lord say.

You remember in Matthew's Gospel where we have the Sermon on the Mount, you'll read there that the Lord said, if you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him.

Now that's the Lord's words, and if I'm not mistaken, what James is saying to us here is very, very heavily influenced by what he heard the Lord say.

He is fully conversant with the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and he understands the implications of it for himself and for all who are believers in Jesus.

The God who does not change by reason of his very nature is a God who is consistent in showing mercy to his own people, his church.

[ 27 : 02 ] Remember the words that we find in the Old Testament, the prophecy of Malachi, and again, I'm not going to apologize for when my mind goes back to the things that I heard in my youth.

I often come across verses in the Bible, and when I read these verses, a face appears before my mind's eye.

And the reason a face appears before my mind's eye when I read these verses is because these verses were often quoted by the person whose face is presented before my mind's eye.

And in the book of Malachi, the prophet was saying, For I, the Lord, do not change, therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. And I remember one deacon in particular, and he stood to pray, and this was one stock text that he would quote.

I, the Lord, do not change, therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. That's the fear of the Christian, that at some point God's mercy is going to be exhausted, as far as they're concerned, that they're going to run him so fine that he'll just say that's enough.

[ 28 : 32 ] But that's not what God says. He's the covenant God, the covenant keeping God, the God who is consistently presenting his gifts to his people as one who will always provide them for every situation they find themselves in.

Now it seems in verse 8 that there should change. 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.

But I've already hinted at the fact that it's not really a change. But that he is moving towards the gift of all gifts. That he is now beginning to talk about something that he cannot get away from.

That he has been the beneficiary. That he has been the recipient. That he has received from God a gift like no other.

The gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. Remember he says in verse 16 he is writing to fellow believers.

[ 29 : 51 ] Do not be deceived he says my beloved brother. brother. Do not be deceived. And because they are his brothers the word to them is applicable.

Every single one of them share the same experience. They have enjoyed the gift of Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

The greatest gift that anyone can bestow is the gift of new life through Jesus Christ. And in this verse there are three things that stand out.

It is the will of God, it is the word of God, and it is the fruit of God. Notice that. Do you remember when Jesus conversed with Nicodemus?

he had to teach Nicodemus certain truths that he had not grasped. He had to displace certain beliefs that he had and replace them with the gospel, replace them with the truth of the gospel.

[ 31 : 12 ] Then Paul writes, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. salvation is God's gift to fallen man.

That's what the apostle wants us to remember, to understand. What we need to remind ourselves of and what we needed to have our skewed understanding of what the gospel was all about corrected was not only are we unable to save ourselves, we are unable to make God save ourselves.

Have you ever thought of that? You know, there are plenty of people and that's what they think they need to do. I will read my Bible, I will say my prayers, I will be a good little boy or a good little girl, and in so doing I will receive salvation from the hand of God.

God says no such thing. Salvation is all of grace. Salvation is God's provision for a needy people.

God's will save you. Save me and persuade him to save you. It's wise for you to go to him and petition on your knees for the salvation, but for him to do it for you, not for him to do it so that you can do it yourself.

[ 32 : 57 ] we cannot get God to save us, yet how many people try to do both things. The author of new life is God, and he does it by means of the truth.

That's what he says. He breathes life into dead souls. He does that by the hand of the Holy Spirit. He quickens, he regenerates.

God, through the Spirit, opens the mind, heart, and soul to receive the truth, and accept the truth, and with empty hands receive what the truth is saying to you concerning God's provision in Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that the Apostle Paul is able to speak of himself as an instrument. I became your father, he says, in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Now, Paul wasn't saying, I'm your savior, but he is saying that God gave him a wonderful privilege of presenting the gospel to them.

[ 34 : 22 ] God's will. And he gave Paul the privilege of leading men and women of his own generation to receive Christ for the salvation of their soul.

And that is what he is saying. Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth. Whose will?

God's will. By the word of truth. whose word is the word of truth? It is God's word. That we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

Now, that seems a bit perplexing. That will finish. What does he mean by the kind of first fruits of his creatures? Well, I think what it means is that in Jewish tradition, at the harvest, for example, the first fruits were always put to one side and they were given to God.

Nobody was allowed them. These were given back to the God who gave them to them. He had the first right to whatever the fruit was, whether it was the fruit of the vine or the fruit of the harvest, be it wheat or barley.

[ 35 : 53 ] It was always ring-fenced and given back to God and God received the glory because he was the source of that fruit.

But that's not what James is saying here, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures. In other words, those who are his, who are born again by the Spirit of God, those who are the recipients of his grace, those who are the recipients of his mercy, who have received this gift, what do they do?

Well, they give back to God themselves themselves that we should be a kind of first fruits of the creature.

In other words, every believer, every person born again, every person who has come to know the Lord by way of his goodness and his grace, what do they do in return?

They give themselves as a living sacrifice to the God who came into their lives and who saved them through Christ Jesus.

[ 37 : 16 ] Is that what you are? Is that what you are tonight? are you the kind of first fruit of his creatures?

I always wondered about what he meant by it, but I think, I might be wrong, but I think that's what he means. That once you receive the gift of salvation, once you receive Christ Jesus as a gift, what else can you do but give yourself to the giver?

No less. Well, may God help you to understand the privilege of being the beneficiary of God's gift. Every good and perfect gift is from the Father of light, the God of all grace.

And if we recognize that, then who else can we go to to seek light on the goodness of the gift that he has to be stolen?

Let us pray. Lord, help us to appreciate the provisions that you provide to us in our life. You are a God who supplies all our needs, all our creature needs are met by you.

[ 38 : 38 ] The food that we eat, the clothing on our back, the comfort that we enjoy in our homes, that many in this world may be devoid of.

And yet we have these things, and we have them out of the goodness of your heart. We bless you for that. But especially we give thanks for the goodness of the gospel that has reached these shores and that speaks to us yet of a saviour for sinners.

Bless us in his name and cleanse us through him. Amen. Our closing psalm is psalm 37. Again, we're singing from the Scottish Psalter, psalm 37, and we're singing from verse 37 to the end of the psalm.

Mark thou the perfect, and behold the man of our brightness, because that surely of this man the latter end is peace. But those men that transgressors shall be destroyed together, the latter end of wicked men shall be cut off forever.

But the salvation of the just is from the Lord above. He in the time of their distress, their stay and strength doth prove.

[ 40 : 03 ] The Lord shall help and them deliver. He shall them free and save from wicked men, because in him their confidence they have.

These verses of Psalm 37 verse 37 to the end, Mark thou the perfect, and behold the man of our brightness. Mark thou the perfect, and behold with us sage ■■■, the dening of this The fury of this man will utter endless peace.

But those when the transgressors are, shall be destroyed together.

The laughter of wicked men shall be cut off forever.

But the salvation of the just is from the Lord above.

[ 41 : 50 ] He in the time of their distress, their stay unsenteth through.

The Lord shall help the land deliver. He shall never free and save.

From the wicked men, he was in him. Their confidence they have.

Now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all now and always. Amen.