

INTRODUCTION >

Illustration: Hiking the Mountain

Why did we do it?

- A friend told us about it, and then I went online and saw pictures.
- A friend's advice and the photos made the confusing switchbacks and steep sections worth enduring.
- And then during the hike, I got my phone out continually just to confirm we were going the right way.

In the first 18 verses, James sets out to meet the dispersed Jewish Christians with a difficult truth.

- He seeks to help them understand the confusing circumstances they now walk through.
- It's a wilderness guide for living in the Already freedom of their Redemption while waiting for the perfect joy of the Not Yet
- To help them understand that even in the times when it seems like they are going the exact opposite direction, or when the terrain seems like it is too much for them, they are meant to seek God for wisdom and remember that God is not only with them, but He is Good, and He will use the difficult and confusing circumstances to remove alloys from their joy as He brings them to Himself.

Please stand as we read the word of the Lord:

Read James 1:16-18

Pray

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Purpose Statement

We must continually step back in trials and stay oriented to the Word of God's goodness, which does not change and is the will of our new birth and completion.

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Today, we will look at the following:

1. In the Cosmos
2. In Redemption
3. In completion

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I. IN THE COSMOS >

VERSE - [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.

Summary Statement

Trials tempt us to believe a lie that God's character is volatile, but God's Goodness does not change.

The Deceit

Do not be deceived!

So what is the deception that we're in danger of believing?

It is the lie that we have been discussing over the past four weeks.

- And that is the lie that we're tempted by in the midst of the trials and tests in this age.
- The lie that the trials declare that God is not a Good Father.
 - That He is either holding something good back from us, or that He wants us to suffer.

Before we continue through this passage, we need to remember God's work in the trials.

Since the sin and the fall of humanity, the world has been subjected to decay, futility, and uncreation.

- That is the consequence of sin.
- It causes the broken world and hearts we live in and with.

But God, by His mercy and sovereign grace, is not willing to allow the suffering of the testing of this age to go to waste.

- He weaves it together in the lives of those who love Him for their ultimate and eternal good and His glory!
- For those who love Him, no tear is unseen OR wasted.
- He is able and willing to redeem all things!

And **because** this truth, this reality, is so very difficult to hold in our minds, especially when our bellies are hungry, our mouths are dry, our bodies are broken, and we're confused in the dark, there is a foothold opportunity for a lie to be believed in our hearts!

And that lie is that the Father is not good.

Specifically, the lie James addresses here is that God may have been good at one time, but He has changed.

He is no longer good.

So then any Ebenezer of His faithfulness that we might have erected of His goodness has been obsoleted, or worse, it's been eclipsed by His negligence in the trial.

So, when we're tested, we could believe the lie that any goodness that we have experienced from God might have been a vapor glory.

A vanishing mist that could not support our weight in a true test.

Unchanging Good

So then James moves to address the lies our human hearts are tempted by, with the truth about who God really is and he writes:

[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.

Every good and perfect gift is from above.

Again, last week we read that while the Father allows the trials of this world that has been subjected to decay as a consequence of our sin, He doesn't TEMPT us in the trial.

And we read here that, in fact, He is the author of every good and perfect gift.

From the Father of Lights!

This title points us to the truth of God's creative power in speaking the light of the sky into existence.

And see the contrast! He is the Father of lights in whom there is no shadow of change!

- The word translated as "change" here in the ESV can be translated as "turning."
- We know the lights in the sky are in continual motion of turning.
- Even the Sun is spinning and orbiting in the galaxy.

And so, unlike those lights, the FATHER, the Creator of those turning lights, is unchanging.

- He is not like a day, or a month, or a season, or a tide that waxes and wanes.

- His steady hand is immutable.
 - There is no greater force that he orbits or is changed by.
 - It is His glory that shapes all things.
 - All true light and true good are derivative of Him.

Possibly not until that day.

And also! We need to understand that His goodness in these things might not be made clear to us in this age.

The Bible, and James here, is not calling us to continually analyze every test and affliction for the present age goodness it brings.

- We should be careful to not take the posture of thinking, if I could just see and understand the good here, then I would trust God.
- And so we ought to be careful when making final summary statements about the work of God, even after the storm has passed.

In other words, we should understand that the good we might see after the trial is still a dim assumption.

What this passage and the Psalms call us to is for our hearts to simply say, He is Good!

- And His goodness goes **into** the difficulty, and **out** the other side.
- And the dimensions of His compassion and love for His people are far beyond what we can even imagine!

And yes, we should stand on the other side of the Red Sea and the Jordan, and sing His praise for what we saw Him do, but also, we acknowledge that it is far better, far more good than we could ever understand.

- And so, no matter what our eyes may understand, we know, we trust, that He is who He says He is, and we are who He says we are!
- We celebrate His goodness in the already, even though we don't understand the fullness of its Good!

Summary Statement

Trials tempt us to believe a lie that God's character is volatile, but God's Goodness doesn't change.

Transition: James then points our eyes to the ultimate truth about God's Goodness.

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II. IN REDEMPTION >

Summary Statement

It is by His Will through His Word that we have been Reborn

Of His Will

Illustration: Determination and Ability - Running a Marathon

If I were determined to run a Marathon tomorrow without stopping, it would make no difference how determined I was; I would fall short because I do not have the ability to do it! **Conversely**, I might have the ability to do something as strange as run a marathon, yet have no desire or determination; then I would not persevere through the 26 miles.

So if someone wills something to happen, it means they have the determination and ability to do so.

We read here that VERSE

[18a] Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth,

It's "of His own Will"

So what follows that statement is **fully dependent** on God's determination and His power.

And when we talk about God's Will in this age on earth, we have two categories.

We have His Commanded Will and His Sovereign Will.

In this age on earth, **His commanded will is what He has called all of creation to, BUT in our free agency, we have gone against what He has commanded.**

- We have vained, that is, emptied the image we've been created to bear and commanded to declare.

His Sovereign Will is His governance that doesn't fail to bring things to pass.

- Creation cannot resist the Governance and Administration of God's sovereignty.
- Even in our rebellion, His Zeal and Power will accomplish what it has set out to do.
 - All things for all time are not some simulation that God has or is running.
 - They are all ordered from the beginning, and when all time is seen clearly, we will realize that all time and all things were all brought together and summed up in Him.
 - He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning, end, and summary of what has been, what is, and what will be.

And this is SO important for us to understand!

If we do not have these categories of God's will, we'll either live in constant anxiety and fear about what is to come and our part in it, OR we will not pursue that which is good and right in this age, because if God is in control, then what does it matter what we do?

Birthed

In this verse, James is addressing the Sovereign Will of God.

That is, the things He will not fail to bring to pass.

It says, it is by this Will of our Good God that we have been brought forth.

"Brought Forth" is to be birthed.

So then, those who are in Christ,
those who address the God who spoke the Lights of the Heavens into existence as Father,
have been born into that position by His sovereign Will!
Fully dependent and assured by His unflinching determination and power to accomplish these things.

By the Gospel

And so, yes, He is determined, but what is this power by which He has brought His will to pass?

What is the power to do this work of rebirth?

"By the word of truth"

The Word of Truth is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:16–17

[16] For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

The Gospel is the power of His WILL for our salvation.

- And the means by which God has ordained that humanity takes hold of that power is belief.

And for a moment let's remember what the work of the Gospel looked like.

- The Good News is not the story of Jesus walking through an idyllic green pasture.

- It is the news of the Son of God entering exile and darkness, a test so traumatic, burdensome, and intense that in His prayers to the Father His sweat gathered on His body like blood.

I mentioned earlier that for us *the truth of God's Goodness is so very difficult to hold in our minds, especially when our bellies are hungry, our mouths are dry, our bodies are broken, and we're confused in the dark; because there is a foothold opportunity for a lie to be believed in our hearts!*

On the cross, the mouth of Jesus was so very dry, and his body was broken, and it went very dark!

- BUT even in this trial, the Son of God, by the will of the Father, and for our sake, did not believe a lie.
- He endured the trial of horror for the pure Joy set before Him!
- And Hebrews says that He was made perfect, that is, enabled to be our Savior through the suffering of this trial.
 - He who knew no sin, became our sin, so that we who only knew sin, could become His righteousness!

And it is the grace of this imputed righteousness to those who trust in Him that we now stand before God in Right Standing.

By the work of the Spirit of God, through the Gospel of God in and through the Son of God, we have been regenerated, that is, reborn, for a faith that we now walk in.

- He has taken the dry bones of His enemies that were dead to life, and brought them forth to now live as His Children.
- Those who now walk as new creatures, whose grave clothes of death are in the process of falling off as we behold the person of our Rebirth.

This is the determination and power of the will of our Good Father.

- And so we can be assured that it is in the trials and testing that the remains of our death are being removed.
- And we know that this work of our being brought forth will also not be completed by us, but rather, will be completed by the sovereign will of the one who started the work.

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III. IN COMPLETION >

VERSE - [18b] that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Summary Statement

What His Gospel began, He Will Finish!

The Foretaste!

Illustration: BBQ - The aroma implies something that is to come.

Go outside and smell a BBQ, and your mouth waters; it would be strange if the neighbor said, “Yeah, come on over! And you went in and realized that the aroma of cooked meat was not dinner, but rather some candles.

The Aroma that causes your mouth to water is telling you and your stomach that there is something coming.

So, James goes on to say that those whom God, by His Will through His Gospel, has brought forth are a kind of firstfruits of His creatures!

Firstfruits carry the weight of A foretaste, or a down payment, or we could even say an aroma.

- It is the first ray of sun on the eastern horizon at the dawn of a new day.
- It is the aroma of the meal as you sit down at a table already prepared.
- It is the guarantee of the promise made.
- It is the assurance of things unseen.

And so what we see then is that all those whose trust is in the Gospel of God in Christ Jesus are now to be seen as a foretaste, an aroma, a prologue to that which will be!

Every good fruit born from the life of a believer testifies to the Great Harvest that is to come.

- When the church gathers and sings praise to her King, we're declaring that “Already Kingdom” has been inaugurated, and it's being revealed in the lives of His people.

And it is this Already-ness of the new creation that we're jealous for the world to taste.

- To see an upside-down radiant glory that is pushing into the city we have been sovereignly placed in by the Will of the One who bore us.
- That they would see and experience a peculiar response to the trials of the same world they live in.
- That the blessed life is not found in the depth of our finances but rather in the dimensions of the love of Christ.
- And all of this bears witness and screams that this world, this age, is not the end.
- **Our lives testify to that which is to come!**

We Will Be Completed

Again, we mentioned that the lie in the trial is that God's goodness is a vanishing mist that could not support our weight in the true test.

- We will not be put to shame, and one day, all people for all time will in fact see that His goodness has been, is, and will always be unchanging and sturdy, able to even support our weight in the final and full test of eternity!

Illustration: You order something very expensive online, and of course you will pick it up
You paid a great cost; it is paid for. You'd be foolish to not pick it up.

Christ is no fool!

He has paid the full price on the cross; He will surely collect what He has purchased.

- If you are sure of His work on the cross, be sure of His work on the throne.
- As sure as we are of His arrival during the Advent season, be equally as sure that He will come again!
- And it is in His second Advent that all things will be revealed for what they are!

This includes the suffering of this present age.

Romans 8:18–25

[18] For I consider that the **sufferings** of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. [19] For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. [20] For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope [21] that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. [22] For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Paul knows that what we see in this age can often feel hopeless.

- He knows that if the glory that if there is no glory to come.
- If all there is to life is that which is secular, that is, the things of this age, then we ought to operate on the wisdom of the world - which says, eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow...we all die!
- But Paul believes in the resurrection of the dead, and a future, forever glory!
- A glory only seen dimly in the Already.
- A glory that seems to tease us from the horizon and margins, but never seems to dawn.
- And His life is so bent on the assurance of these things, that his entire life looks silly, pitiable, to those who only live for what they see, and therefore are sent into despair when all they can see is the hardships of the trial.

And so Paul goes on to say in Romans 8.

[24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?

[25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

And then He writes: Romans 8:28–30

Verse [28] And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

God is working all things together for good for those who love Him, even the trials in this life that feel like complete setbacks or complete losses.

- He is not WILLING to waste any of our suffering of this present age.

Verse [29] For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. [30] And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

God has been, is, and will continue to work all things for good.

- He is jealous that we would look like the image of His Son.
- And these momentary trials are the “if necessary” agents of refinement of our faith, that is, our confident hope in the God who is Good, and will not fail to accomplish His Sovereign will, even in our falling short of His commanded Will.

Church,

- Take heart, our Groom has passed through the darkest trial, to purchase and give His bride His righteous robes.
- The payment has been made! There will be a wedding!

Paul wrote this in 2 Corinthians 2:14–16

[14] But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. [15] For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, [16] to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? (ESV)

The language of a triumphal procession is meant to evoke the image of a grand Roman victory parade after a military victory.

See the contrast!

- We're not those who walk in grumbling and complaining; we walk in a triumphal procession behind the One whom the world thought was conquered by the trial.
- We bear witness to a God who is Good and over all things.
- And as we walk in His Wisdom that He is generous to give, it looks very strange in difficult situations; we're the peculiar aroma of Life to a world being consumed by the decay of darkness in this age.

Summary Statement

What His Gospel began, He Will Finish!

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CONCLUSION >>>

And so

In all of this, over the last five weeks, we're presented with a decision.

A choice we will make, either explicitly or implicitly.

And that is: **who or what will we run to and trust in the midst of a trial?**

- **Again, trials and tests uniquely reveal what our hearts worship.**
- The temptation of the world is to believe that God is against us, or negligent, and so we should turn toward created things to find shelter, meaning, and joy.

And as we will continually see in the book of James, this is not about what we simply understand; this is about HOW we walk!

- Will we walk as the children of Israel did in their wilderness trial, or will we walk as followers of Christ, the True and Better Israel?
- And in doing so, we're declaring to the world the Goodness of our God in this age and the age to come!

And so, for us, we cling to truth in the suffering of this present age.

In 20 billion years, we will clearly see that this moment is the hardest part of all eternity!

So then, therefore!

- When our legs get weary on the path, when it sure seems like we're being led off a cliff, and the deceit of the enemy is whispered to our hearts about the character of our God, when our flesh has been weakened by the trials of this world that is in decay, our hearts are meant to groan these truths:

I will not believe a lie; God is Good, and all true Good is from Him, and that has not, and will not change.

- **He spoke the turning lights of the sky** into existence, and He will weave even this horrible consequence of humanity's sin into a Good thing for those who love Him!
- And He will complete what **He inaugurated on the third day!**
- And so, even in the suffering of this age, we walk in a **triumphal procession** toward the full restoration of all things!

- A forever age in which **He will be the unchanging Light of the Sky**, and for those who love Him, there is no wilderness exile; there is only Garden City fellowship before His face and favor forevermore!
- An eternity of forever “withness.”
 - No more trials and no more lies. No more tears and no more fears.
 - No more hunger and no more thirst. No more decay and no more deceit.

Only Him in His full glory, as we’re continually and increasingly shaped by His beauty and worth forevermore!

Living the lives we were always meant to live in the place we were always meant to be!

And so, in the hardship, we’re not those who seek to escape the hardship by the shallow happiness of fairy tales and earthly pleasures.

- We’re those who strive and strain to take hold of the deep bedrock joy beneath the surface.
- We pursue the blessed ways of those who remain steadfast in the trials, counting them as a purifying agent of our eternal joy.

And we do all these things, with an assurance of a promise made flesh.

- An unchanging promise that **found its Amen** in the person of Jesus.
- A promise made sure when He went into the darkest trial of the night, and came out the other side of a tomb that was sealed with a stone.
 - A promise that now makes Him the great steadying stone and shelter of every trial we might face.

And we resist the secular desire to declare our wisdom of all the things He is and might be accomplishing in and through us as we press on.

- And we say, we know that He is accomplishing something, something so good that it’s too wonderful for us to hold in our minds.
- And so, even now with tear-stained faces, weak knees, sore legs, and hands that are weary and tired from clenching, we praise Him as our bodies collapse in His care.

Finding rest for our weary souls in the presence and person of our gentle and lowly Elder Brother who sought us out in our sin and paid the price to not only free us from our sin, but bring us home in His Best Robes!

Let’s Pray

Consider

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Questions to consider:

Do you believe that God is Good all the time and in all things?

What question(s) do you need to take to Him today?