

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES

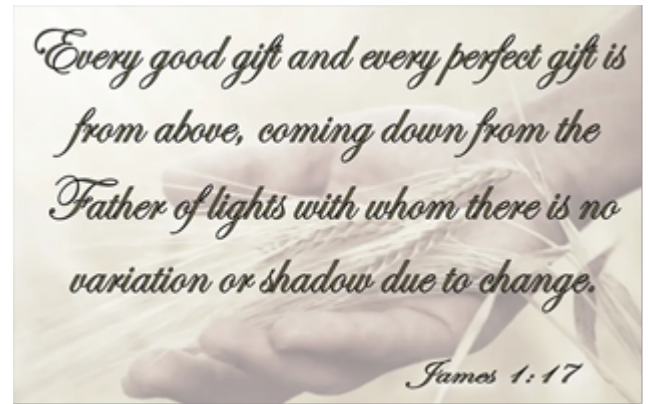
Theme: "The Testing of Your Faith"

Lesson: 7 Text: 1:16-20 Date: 3-5-23

Trinity Lutheran Church

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TEXT AND STUDY NOTES

(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.**

(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.

(Gen 1:3-5,14-19; Ex 22:29; 23:19; Lev 23:9-14; Num 23:19;

Ps 85:12; 102:27; 136:7; Jer 2:3; Dan 2:22; Mal 3:6;

Jn 1:5,13; 3:3-8,27; Rom 8;19-23; 16:5; 1 Cor 4:7; 6:9; 15:20-28; 16:15;

Eph 1:12; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 1:3,23-25; 1 Jn 1:5; Rev 14:4)

(19) Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

(20) for the anger of man does not produce **the righteousness that God requires.**

(Prov 10:19; 14:29; 17:27; Eccl 5:1,2; 7:10;

Mt 5:22; 13:17; Lk 1:6,75; 2:25; 23:50; Rom 6:1-5,12-24; 1 Jn 2:21)

Commentary on James – "The Epistle of Faith" – Dr. David Scaer - CPH

The vocabulary of this section with its strong Christological terminology and salvific expressions indicates that James is speaking of God's plan of salvation in an abbreviated way. It could be paraphrased in this way: "The one perfect and good gift of salvation has already come down from heaven." This would of course be God's work of incarnation and atonement in Jesus Christ. Since this suggestion may to some be startlingly new, it must be carefully delineated.

What is the "every good and perfect gift"(NIV)? Must it refer to many gifts or could it possibly refer to simply one gift which can be beneficial in any number of situations?

The two Greek words translated as "gift" (*dosis* and *dōrēma*) have overlapping but still distinguishable meanings. *Dosis* carries the meaning of gift, and *dōrēma* the idea of generosity.⁷ Paul uses the latter word for God's generosity in giving salvation (Rom. 5:16). *Dosis* is derived from *didōmi*, (to give) and, as mentioned, is frequently used of God's giving of Himself in Jesus Christ for the world's salvation. The Greek words for "all" (*pasa* and *pan*) stress the gift's wholeness, totality, and purity, which can be individualized for a particular situation.⁸

The words "good" (*agathē*) and "perfect" (*teleion*) add still another dimension. Most appropriately "good" refers to God Himself (Matt. 19:17). The gift is good because it originates with God and carries with it God's own qualities. James has moved beyond the ethical, moral, or philosophical

The phrase “Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth” (v. 18) is a specific reference to the Christian’s regeneration. James uses the same words for the regeneration of the Christian as for sin giving birth to death (1:15, *apokuō*). There is no clue as to why James prefers *apokuō* to *gennaō*, which with its cognates is used by other New Testament writers in describing the process of regeneration. A hesitancy to give verbatim quotes from Jesus may be the answer. James’ use of *apokuō* would indicate an unusually creative literary mind. First Peter 1:23, a clear parallel, also attributes regeneration (*anagennaō*) to the Word of God. First Peter has been recognized by some as a treatise or homily on Baptism. With the similarity between James 1:18 and 1 Peter 1:23 so evident, it could very well be that James is alluding to the baptism of his readers. The great regeneration chapter, John 3, specifically attributes regeneration to water and the Spirit (v. 5). The background for this section is the preaching of John the Baptist, who required baptism of those desiring to enter the Kingdom. James calls God’s regenerating element “the Word of truth” because, as His truth, this Word shares in His invariableness.¹⁰

With his description of the Christian’s birth from God by the Word, James is touching the doctrines of the sacraments, the Holy Spirit, and authority. This act of birth in their baptism is at the foundation of his readers’ lives. Through God’s act of begetting in baptism they have come into a new relationship with Him. This new relationship brings life and not death as did the older birth in which desire brought forth sin. The new relationship demands faith, which James also calls love for Jesus. Those who love Jesus are promised the crown of life. They have been reborn by the Father’s Word of truth.

James’ doctrine of the Holy Spirit exists as a shadow in his letter, but it’s there. The early church, so close to the person of Jesus as the manifestation of God, concentrated on Christology. The Spirit was reality, but it was left to later generations to develop what was nevertheless early set forth in the New Testament. In the early church those who were born again and had been baptized were those upon whom the Spirit had worked (Acts 2:38). New birth and the Spirit were coordinate thoughts for the New Testament.

Because of God’s act of regeneration, Christians enjoy a special place in the totality of God’s creation. They have now become the firstfruits of creation. James here is speaking of the total restoration of the entire creation and not merely the redemption of the human race. This doctrine of universal restoration finds its classical expression in Paul’s discussion of the corruption of the creation on account of man’s sin with the promise of its future restoration with “the redemption of our bodies,” Christians being the firstfruits of this cosmic restoration (Rom. 8:18-23).

LIFE APPLICATION

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.

Since God is the Father of lights – how do we reflect that light?

What are the most precious good and perfect gifts from above?