

Remembering That God Is Always Good

Spiritual Maturity

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The scripture reading this evening is James chapter 1, verses 1 through 18. We turn again to James chapter 1 as we work through this series on the letter. We read the first 18 verses and the text is verses 17 and 18 and it will be profitable to keep our Bibles open during the course of the sermon. We'll be looking at this language in verses 17 and 18, jumping back and forth between these two verses so it will be profitable to have the passage open before us. James chapter 1.

1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting. 2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting [lacking] nothing. 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7 For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. 8 A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. 9 Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: 10 But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11 For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth: so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways. 12 Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. 13 Let no man say when he is tempted [when he succumbs to the temptation], I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: 14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. 15 Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. 16 Do not err, my beloved brethren. 17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. 18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word. I'll reread verses 17 and 18.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. 18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, by way of introduction, I want to make two comments related to this passage. First, I want to have us observe and appreciate the intimate connection that exists between right doctrine and practical living. We know that that relationship exists, but I want to point it out with this passage for a moment, the connection between doctrine and practice. I want to point that out because here in the text this evening, we have some very weighty doctrinal ideas being used. In verse 17, we have one of the strongest expressions in all of scripture regarding the immutability of God, with God, there is no variableness, no changingness, neither shadow of turning. That's God's immutability and that word immutability means this, God never changes in his own being and in his own works and ways. That's what the Essentials students are going to memorize in a few weeks, God's immutability, he never changes because he's already infinitely perfect. He has no need to change. Any change on the part of God would imply imperfection on his part. That's verse 17. Then verse 18, we have one of the strongest expressions regarding God's sovereignty in salvation. Verse 18 emphasizes, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." Of his own will, that is, according to his own eternal purpose, according to his own sovereign desire, he regenerated us. Salvation is all of God. That's verse 18.

So verses 17 and 18, very weighty things but now notice, what is James actually talking about in this whole passage? He's focused here on how we respond to the very practical, difficult trials in our lives. He's focused on the very practical issue of how to handle temptation and he's really focused on encouraging and comforting God's people in the midst of their temptations. And in the midst of that discussion, very practical discussion, he brings in some very weighty doctrinal concepts regarding God's immutability and regarding the doctrine of regeneration. And the point right now is simply this: we ought to see and appreciate there's always an intimate connection that exists between right doctrine and practical living. In order to live rightly, we need to be thinking rightly. Take care of how you think. Take care of knowing your doctrine because how you think is going to direct your attitude towards life and it's going to factor in, it's going to direct the life choices that you make.

So in the midst of a very practical letter that we've been emphasizing is very practical, James is also very doctrinal. That, first of all, is something we need to see and appreciate. And then second of all, by way of introduction, I want to make sure that we understand the line of thought in this whole section of the letter. As you read the letter of James, he can sometimes appear to jump from one concept to another without any obvious connection, but there is a connection in everything that James is writing in this section. It goes back to verse 2. James begins his letter by encouraging God's people to count it all

joy when they fall into diverse temptations. James says, count it all joy when you come across all the various trials of your life. He knows that the saints to whom he is writing are experiencing great trials, many of them experiencing persecution, poverty. He wants to encourage them and he wants to encourage them to think about their trials in the light of who God is and what God's purpose is with the trials in their lives. So he says, "count it all joy when you come across various trials; Knowing this, the trying of your faith works patience." Remember, God is doing a good work in you. God is bringing you further along on the road of spiritual maturity. He is, as we heard it this morning, molding you more and more after the image of Jesus Christ. So rejoice in that reality in the midst of your trials.

Then he goes on in verses 5 through 16 to give all kinds of instruction relating to that exhortation. In verses 5 through 8, James says, "If you need any wisdom to think properly about your trials, if you need any wisdom to navigate the trials of your life, ask God, because he is a generous giver who gives liberally." In verses 9 through 12, James goes on to give examples of what wisdom looks like in the trials of life and what rejoicing in the trials of life looks like. The brother of low degree, the poor brother in Christ should rejoice in his trial of poverty. He should rejoice in the fact that he has been made spiritually rich in Jesus Christ. He has been raised to sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus. And the rich man in Christ, the rich brother in Christ, he should rejoice in his trial of riches and bearing that responsibility. He should rejoice in the fact that he has been given the eyes to see his spiritual poverty outside of Jesus Christ and he should rejoice in the fact that he, rich though he is, has been driven to find Christ as his only comfort in life and death. And then in our last sermon, verses 13 through 16, James emphasizes that when we do fall into sin, don't let anyone fall into the trap of trying to blame God for it. Don't let anyone say when he succumbs to the temptation that God made me do it. No, because when a man sins, it's because he has been drawn away of his own lusts and enticed.

So that's the line of thinking in this whole section and now here we come to verses 17 and 18 and with these verses, we, in a sense, come full circle and James states explicitly what was already implied in verses 2, 3, and 4. What James says here in verses 17 and 18 is this: rather than blaming God for the temptations you have succumbed to, what you need to remember and recognize is this, God is the one who only gives good things. God doesn't tempt you to sin, verse 13, no, but the truth actually is God only gives you good things. And even the trials he gives you and the challenges he gives you, they come from God as good gifts to you with a good purpose for you and this is always the case with you exactly because God is the God who is immutable, who never changes. So what we have in this passage is, in fact, a very comforting and encouraging passage of scripture for those going through trials. We take as our theme this evening, "Remembering That God Is Always Good," and we look at that theme under three points. First, we look at his good gifts. Second, we look at his unchanging good character. And then third, we look at his good purpose.

Well, as we begin looking at these two verses and the language, we need to say something particular about the language. I have three things briefly to say. First of all, at

the beginning of verse 17, it says, every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and the question that immediately comes is, to whom? For whom is this true? Who are the recipients of these gifts? And the answer is you and me. God's people. That's the focus of James in the context here. James is writing to the saints, to the 12 tribes who are scattered abroad. James is writing to his beloved brothers and sisters. James is writing to those who have been begotten again by the word of truth and the gifts of which he is speaking are gifts that are given to you and to me as God's people. That's the focus here. Every good and perfect gift to us. That's what's here, that's the idea in verse 17, to us.

Second of all, we might ask, why the repetition? Every good gift and every perfect gift, why doesn't it just say every good and perfect gift? Why the repetition? Well, it's because the English word, gift, that appears at the beginning of verse 17, twice, is actually two different words in the original. Slightly different words, so that in the original it really could be translated this way, "Every good act of giving." That's the first word gift. Act of giving. Every good act of giving emphasizing the activity of giving, and then "every perfect gift," and that word gift is talking about the gift itself. Both the activity of giving and the gift itself are from above. The word good emphasizes that this activity of giving is morally good. It is a morally good act of giving. And the word perfect emphasizes that the gift itself is complete. It's not lacking in any way. And the idea might also be that these gifts are perfect in the sense that they serve our spiritual perfection. They serve our spiritual maturity. So the passage, verse 17, could read like this, "Every morally good act of giving and every spiritually upbuilding gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights."

The third thing we need to point out is this, with the language that James uses, James is not merely emphasizing that only good things come from God so that we can't put the blame on God for tempting us. Only good things come from God. He's saying that, but he's saying something more. He's also emphasizing this: in all that God gives, God is good to us. Not just that God only gives good things, but that in all that he gives us, he is good to us. That's the character of God. That's always what characterizes God in his dealings with his people. He only ever gives his people good gifts. That's the meaning. That's the significance. That's the import of what James is saying. God only ever gives his people good.

Now that might not actually seem to be the case. Is every gift that God gives me as his child good? Because we tend to evaluate whether something is good for us based on how it affects us merely at the level of this earthly life. The issues we are usually wrapped up in are these issues, how does this trial, how does this circumstance make me feel? If it makes me feel bad or in pain, well then it's bad. If it makes me feel good, well then it's good. And what James is saying is this, that's not how our approach should be. If that's how we are going to evaluate things in our lives, then our lives are going to be disasters because as Job says, "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." What James is really saying is this, we need to evaluate the things in our lives from a higher perspective. We need to evaluate things in our lives in the light of this reality: God is good, God is faithful, and what God gives us is good, it is always good, and it is for our good. It is a good gift, and it is a perfect gift. That's what comes to us from above, to us. That's what

comes to us. Whatever you receive, however you receive it, it is a good gift that comes from above.

Now, how can you say that? How is that true? It's true when you remember the purpose God has in giving you what he gives you. We'll look at this in the third point, but we look at this already now. He gives you things not to destroy you, but he gives you things to mature you. He gives you trials so that you might grow in patience and so that you might ultimately come to spiritual maturity and perfection. Now this is not to make us spiritually insensitive to when others are groaning in their sorrow or in their grief, this is not a text that is supposed to make us stoics so that we grow numb to the pain and sorrow of life, but this is to say this: continue to exercise patience in your circumstances. Continue to heed God's commandments. Don't turn to the path of sin. Don't succumb to the temptation because the reality is, in this moment, God is not against you but God is for you. He is leading you still now as his beloved sheep and he knows exactly what needs to be done to bring you to glory, to bring you to the end of spiritual maturity. And even when you fall into sin, it's not as if God stops being your Father. No, but even then he still loves you and he cares for you. That's what the passage is getting at.

This is what the Bible teaches us over and over again. There's other passages that might be more familiar to us. Remember when Joseph is talking to his brothers after their father Jacob has died. You remember what Joseph said to them, "But as for you, ye thought evil against me but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." Joseph was saying, "You selling me into slavery, me spending multiple years in prison, you experiencing a famine in the land, all these trials, which were so many temptations to sin, all these trials, God gave us these things as good and perfect gifts." Remember the words of Romans 8 verse 28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called, according to his eternal decree." They are the called, all things work together for them. Why are all things working together for their good? Because the next verse says, "so that we might be conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ." Or as other passages teach us, "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Affliction has been for my profit. All things are yours, all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

The point James is making at the beginning of verse 17 is this: every single thing that comes to the child of God, whatever it is, comes to us from God as a good gift, his activity of giving it to us is good, and it comes to us as a perfect gift. It is complete, nothing deficient or lacking in it. And we know that that's the meaning here in verse 17, because it goes all the way back to verses 2, 3 and 4, where James started. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith works patience." This trial comes to you as a good gift from God, not to tempt you to sin, not to disappoint you, not to destroy you, but to mold you and shape you more and more after the image of Jesus, which we said this morning is salvation, to give you salvation. And what's the end result going to be? Verse 12, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." And then we'll also look in the third point, the

purpose is that we're going to be a kind of firstfruits. We are a kind of firstfruits of God's creation.

Well, that's the first part of verse 17 and now if we jump down to verse 18, what we have in verse 18 is actually a specific example of a good and perfect gift that God gives, and what we have in verse 18 is actually the proof that what God gives us in our daily lives is always a good and perfect gift. Verse 18, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." What James is talking about there is the doctrine of regeneration. He's talking about being spiritually born again. What is regeneration? The Catechism students know what regeneration is. We talk about it a fair bit. Regeneration is God's activity of taking hold of the elect and yet still dead sinner, and translating him in the very depths of his existence, infusing into him the principle of the life of Christ, taking that dead sinner out of death and bringing him into spiritual life and placing him in abiding communion with the body of Christ. What is regeneration? Regeneration is being born again. When does regeneration happen? It happens when the Holy Spirit unites you to Jesus Christ through the bond of faith and the life of Christ is imparted to you. Regeneration is being raised from spiritual death to spiritual life. Regeneration is the very first step in the order of salvation. It's only through regeneration that we can have our spiritual eyes opened and our spiritual ears opened and we can see and hear the things of the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus says to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven."

Every believer, every saved child of God is given that gift of regeneration. To be regenerated is to be given salvation. But now to be a bit more specific, here in James chapter 1 verse 18, James is not merely referring to that one time event of regeneration, that moment when you are spiritually born again, but what James is talking about includes even the whole experience of coming to consciousness spiritually. I become conscious that I've been born again and I become aware that I am a spiritually reborn child of God. That's implied when James says or writes, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth," and that word of truth is a reference to the preaching. It's in the sphere of the preaching that the Holy Spirit does his work of regenerating God's people, planting within them that seed of regeneration, but then it's also through the preaching that the Holy Spirit of God awakens God's people, opens their eyes, opens their ears so that they come to know consciously for themselves who they are as the reborn children of God. That seed of regeneration that's implanted in them begins to grow. Through the word of God, through the preaching, God's people grow in faith. They, through the preaching, as Christ is presented to them by faith, they take hold of Christ, they appropriate Christ, and through the powerful word that is preached, they begin living out of Christ, walking in holiness and they begin actually consciously living out of that new life they have. And James says, that's our experience. That's what has happened to us.

"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." And what's the first thing James emphasizes about regeneration? What he emphasizes is this: regeneration originates in the sovereign will of Almighty God. Remember the point here, this is a good gift. We'll be reminded of that in just a moment. In the original, the emphasis falls on the first few words of verse 18, "Of his own will." That's why the King James translates it that way,

"Of his own will," that's the emphasis. This is something God has done. This is something God willed in eternity. And this is something God has carried out in our lives right now in time and history. He has begotten us again and the point is, this is exactly one of the good and perfect gifts God has given to his people. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. You want proof? Look at your own spiritual rebirth. You've been born from above. That's the kind of gift God gives. And also think of this, if God is the one who has regenerated us, why would God tempt us to sin? After all, regeneration is exactly God's work of calling us out of sin, out of death, into holiness, into life. That's where I think we can see how verse 18 is intimately connected to everything that's leading up to it. This is not a random verse, but it's deliberate and powerful. God has begotten you to a new spiritual life in Jesus Christ. As the one who has begotten you again, God is your heavenly Father. Jesus is your elder brother. You are part of the family of God. In addition, through the gift of regeneration, you have spiritual life so that you are strengthened, you are enabled to resist temptation and to endure in the trials of life. And as I said, regeneration is salvation. You consciously have experienced your own salvation and what that means is this, you have experienced for yourselves that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. You are an elect child of God. God has loved you from before the foundation of the world. So why would God tempt you to sin? Put away such a foolish notion. Change your attitude, and not only that, but why would God give you any evil thing? Why would God give you anything that would ultimately be to your hurt, to your destruction? He's your Father. He begot you. He loves you.

So all these trials and struggles that he is sending to you in your life, he's sending them to you as good gifts, as perfect gifts, with a good purpose, because he loves you as your Father. Everything you receive from God is a good and perfect gift that comes down from the Father of lights, who is your Father in heaven. So you can rejoice in the midst of your trials. God has good things in store for you. God knows the thoughts that he thinks towards you, the plans that he has for you, thoughts of good and not of evil, to give you an expected end. That's encouragement. That's encouragement for the saints to whom James is writing, and that's encouragement for us. Wherever you are struggling, whenever you are ready to succumb to the temptation, and you feel like the way is just too hard, "I need to sin," you need to remember God is your Father. He has begotten you again by the word of truth. He's made you his own. He's adopted you as his child. This wasn't your doing at all. This was his doing of his own will. This is unconditional love. While you were a sinner, God gave Christ for you. This is who your God is. So you can keep pressing on in the trial. You can, by faith, think, "God is giving me this trial in love, and he will also give me the wisdom I need when I ask it of him. I can be assured he is not against me. He has sent me the preaching. He has raised me from the dead. God does that only to those whom he loves." That needs to be my frame of mind in the midst of these trials and temptations. That's encouragement.

Well, if that wasn't encouragement enough, James goes on in verse 17 and says something more. So we go back now to verse 17. Notice what he adds in verse 17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." What's the point with saying those words? The point is this: God, who has this gracious, loving disposition

towards you, who gives you only good and perfect gifts, who is your Father, who begot you with the word of truth, he is the God who never changes. He never changes in his works and ways, and he never changes in his love for you. So yes, look at the gift. That's one thing. And say the gift is good. But in addition, look also at the giver and look at his unchanging good character. That's what it's getting at.

Notice first, every good gift and every perfect gift is from above. It's from above. That's where God dwells. God dwells above, not below in darkness, but above in glory and in light. And through Jesus Christ, whom we all know has ascended into heaven, through Jesus Christ, who is also above, God pours out gifts upon us. That's how he interacts with us. Jesus is our constant mediator. It's through Jesus that God gives us everything as his children. So through Jesus, God gives us what is good and what is perfect.

Notice second, not only is he from above, but he is the Father of lights and that means he is the Father of the sun and the Father of the moon and the Father of the stars. He's the Father of lights and that might be simple to understand, but the language here is deep on a few levels. He's the Father of lights, which implies, first of all, that he himself is light. He's the one who created the light. which means he himself is light. He is holy. He is good. Children, think about it, if the sun is so glorious, so bright in its glory that you can't even look straight into the sun without burning your eyes, then how much more glorious must not God be who is the Father of the sun, who created the sun? That's his glory. And not only that, but he's the Father of lights and the idea is he's the Father of the sun, moon, and stars by virtue of his creation of them. But what's implied is this, if he is the Father of the sun, moon, and stars, simply by virtue of his creation of them, then how much more isn't he your Father, who not only created you, but who purchased you with the shed blood of Jesus Christ, who adopted you, who actually was the one who begot you again by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit? If he is the Father of lights, if we can use that language, then how much more isn't he your Father? So the point is, God is the Almighty God. He's created the sun, moon, and stars. He is holy. He is the Father who loves his creation. He loves the sun, moon, and stars. And if this is who he is, then certainly he also loves you and will be sure to give you only what is good for you.

And then notice, God is the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. The lights in the sky, they're pretty constant, aren't they? The sun and the moon, you don't really expect them to change. Every day you expect the same in the day, the sun shining, and at night the moon being there. And yet, as we also know, the sun and moon do change in small ways. Throughout the course of a day, or the course of the year, the sun changes quite a bit. The shadow that the sun makes is constantly changing. And the moon, it's always changing also. It waxes and wanes in brightness from a quarter moon to a half moon to a full moon. So the sun, moon, and stars are pretty constant. They're fixed in the sky as signs given to us for signs. They help us keep time. That's how reliable they are. But they still change ever so little. But with God, with God, who is the Father of lights, there is no changing at all. There isn't even the shadow of a change. That's how constant God is. That's how unchanging God is. He is immutable and what that means is that he's always faithful. He's always true. He's always good to his people, working towards that good purpose he has for them. He never changes his mind.

And again, with the same love that he had for you in eternity, choosing you as his elect child, when he decreed to beget you as his child, and with the same love that he has for you in time when he actually begets you with the word of truth, with that same love, he always loves you, even in the midst right now of the difficult struggles and trials he sends your way.

That's what James is writing to the saints that he is writing to and that's what God is saying to us through this passage in the midst of our trials also. Don't say God is tempting you to sin. And I hear this sometimes, that this is what we struggle with. Don't say, "Maybe God hates me otherwise, why would he do this to me?" Don't go there. You may not go there. But say out of true faith, "I know God loves me. I know who I am as his child. I know who he is as the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, and so, I'm not going to give in to the temptation. I'm going to endure. I must press on. I must let patience have her perfect work. I must continue to trust God. I must continue to call on his name and ask for wisdom. Lord, I need help. Give me help. Give me wisdom to think right thoughts. Thou art good in all thy ways and holy in all thy works. Thou art good all the time and all the time thou art good and this is just how it is. These temptations to think that God is hating me right now, this temptation to think that God is against me right now, help me, Lord, to put that away so that these precious truths of who thou art as the one who's begotten me, the one who's the Father of lights who loves me, so that these truths don't slip through my hands." This is my reality as a regenerated child of God. This is my reality as a believer. This is my reality in Jesus Christ. And that means I can be patient. I can rejoice in the midst of my trials because my God is always good to me. I must not despair and I must not give myself over to these lies or over to this sin. I must wait on the Lord. That's what James is putting before these saints.

Well, we've seen so far the good gifts that God gives, we've also seen the unchanging good character of God. Now briefly, we must also see that in all these things, God has a good purpose. You read that in the second half of verse 18. So now we go back to verse 18. that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." That's supposed to be uplifting. That's not just a statement of fact. That's, "Look at this. This is what God has done." And what that means is two things. First, it means you have been dedicated to God in a special way. You are firstfruits You are very precious to God. You are firstfruits. And then second, what it also means is you are a kind of guarantee. You are a promise and a pledge that one day the whole creation is going to be renewed and be made into the new heavens and new earth.

Let me explain those two things. There's deep things here. We have a brief amount of time. First, the idea of firstfruits is a common idea in scripture. In the Old Testament, you know, the firstfruits were the first part of the harvest that was brought in. The farmer would go out to his field, the first grain or whatever that he would bring in, that was the firstfruits and he would have to take that grain and either he would bring it directly to the temple or at another feast you would have to bake it into loaves and then bring it to the temple. The point was he would bring the first part of his harvest to the Lord. That was

the firstfruits to be used in the service of the Lord and James says here, you are the firstfruits. God has begotten us so that we might be a kind of firstfruits. You are those who have been harvested, you might say, spiritually saved, so that you're specially devoted and consecrated unto the service of God in a life of service. And also the point there is this, you're precious. You're precious, and this is also where James is going in the verses that follow. We are firstfruits, and so verse 19, "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." We are to live our lives in holiness, being entirely devoted to God in love and worship and holiness. We'll get to that a bit more next time. But the point here is you are precious to God. You are devoted to God in a favorable way.

And then second, there's also this idea, in the Old Testament, the firstfruits were also a kind of guarantee from God himself that the rest of the harvest would be gathered in. God was saying to his people, "I've brought you this far. I've brought the harvest this far so that you are bringing me the firstfruits. Be assured that the rest of the harvest will be brought in, brought into your barns." And the text says, we are firstfruits. We are that guarantee, that kind of guarantee that the rest of the harvest will be brought in. And what's the rest of the harvest? James writes, we are a kind of firstfruits of his creatures or of his creation. That's what the word creature refers to here. The reference here is to the brute creation. When Christ comes again on the clouds of heaven, there is going to be a kind of begetting, a kind of regeneration that involves the whole creation, a kind of rebirth of the entire creation. The creation will die, as it were. God will destroy this present creation with fire, bring it down to its elements and then we might say, out of the ashes, God will resurrect. He will bring forth a rebirth. He will resurrect the new heavens and the new earth, wherein all things will be brought to spiritual maturity and brought to the purpose that God has with them and James writes you and I are a firstfruits of that reality. Our rebirth, our salvation is a kind of pledge or guarantee that Jesus will realize his victory over sin and evil, and he will bring the whole brute creation into that glory of the new heavens and new earth. He's already begun it in you, in your regeneration. That's a pledge of what's coming ahead.

That's God's purpose with us, beloved. This is God's purpose with creation. This is his purpose in all his dealings with us. He's good. As the Belgic Confession says, he is good and the overflowing fountain of all good. This God is our Father in and through Jesus Christ. He is unchanging in his love for us. Beloved, knowing this, keep enduring. Keep pressing on. That's what James is saying. That's what Jesus says to you. You have your trials, your struggles, your situations, keep enduring. Count your trials all joy knowing that God has a good purpose in them. Knowing that God is your Father who is unchanging in his love. Knowing the blessing of verse 12 as well, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we see thy care for the saints in the early New Testament church, giving them this word of encouragement, and we see thy care and love for us, thy children

today, living in the midst of trials and sorrows. Help us to understand thy word, to see its goodness, to see thy goodness, and to trust in thy word and what it says. Strengthen our faith and we pray that we might experience refreshment and that we might be strengthened to continue on in the way that thou hast set before us, knowing thy love and thy good purpose for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.