

James - God is Good
Sign Title: God is Good

May 8, 2011

Good morning Faith Church! We are a proud members of the Evangelical Free Church of America denomination. This morning, we continue our studies in the book of James.

Before we do that, I have a some important announcements. First, today is Mother's Day. Mothers, could you stand? We want to give you a round of applause. (*applause*) I wanted to make the mother in our household feel special so I gave her a new house and \$500 cash this morning. She wasn't impressed when she realized they both came out of the Monopoly box.

Second, we are in an exciting time for our church family. As many of you know, two and a half years ago we set out to pay off our \$270,000 mortgage. Through God's grace, and the joyful generosity of the congregation, this past fall the mortgage was retired. Just as we completed that project, we were faced with a leaking roof and water seepage in our student ministry center. The total cost of those unexpected repairs was \$170,000. This threatened to put us back into debt. Thankfully, through the generosity of a member of the congregation, a loan was extended to us for that amount, interest free. Today, only seven months later, there is only \$40,000 left to repay that loan in full. So this morning, in a tough economic time, we celebrate how God is providing for the gospel to be proclaimed through Faith Church with the joyful generosity of his people.

Third, the Leadership Board is requesting your prayers. As the Board is contemplating how God wants us to better reach our region with the gospel, God

is laying on our hearts the possibility of opening a Satellite location of Faith Church in another community. That is not a church plant but to have Faith Church be one church operating in two locations to better penetrate our region with the gospel. We have ideas on communities to place the satellite location. We have ideas on how this could work but we are still listening for God's leading on the details and timing of moving forward. As we continue to pray and research this possibility, we are sharing this with you. We are asking you to join us as we prayerfully consider this possibility in the future. If God is behind this, he will confirm this new strategic outreach in our hearts as a congregation.

The Leadership Board is having an informational meeting with the congregation about this and a few other items between services two weeks from today. There are many exciting things happening this week and for that, we rejoice. That being said, let's jump into James.

This message is the last of the *trials and temptations* series in James. Since we covered so much ground in the last few weeks, and because we are closing off this section of James, I want to begin with a little review to get us on the same page.

James wrote to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Because they believed Christ was God in the flesh, crucified in our place for our sins and risen from the dead, they were forced out of Jerusalem. Seeking a place of peace, they scattered throughout the ancient world. Unfortunately, they didn't find rest in other corners of the Roman Empire. As followers of Jesus, the one true God, they refused to incorporate worship of other

local deities into their lives. They also refused to worship the emperor. For that they were considered atheists, because they worshipped only one God.

Since they didn't fit into society, they couldn't find work. Their kids were picked on in school. Their life was a mess through no particular fault of their own other than their love for Jesus and their refusal to worship other gods along with Jesus.

James, who was the senior pastor of the church in Jerusalem, and their former pastor, wrote to give them a different way to look at the trials of life. As Christians who are following in the footsteps of our first century predecessors, James writes also to us. James gives a completely different way to look at tough times in our Christian life. Rather than trials being evidence that God doesn't love us, they are actually evidence of God's deep abiding care. Trials are the anvil upon which God hammers the recalcitrant character of our soul into the shape of Jesus. Trials, when endured, are used by God to grow our faith and teach us to live in dependence upon Christ rather than ourselves.

Trials are God's chosen instrument to bring about spiritual maturity in the lives of his children, something Peter says is worth more than anything this world can offer us.

That doesn't mean trials are easy. In trials we need wisdom to make the right choices under pressure. In the second week in this mini-series, we learned God promises to give us all the wisdom we need in a trial if we would simply ask him for it. He is able and eager to provide us wisdom. We do not face trials alone.

We also learned the difference between *trials* and *temptations*. Trials are allowed into our life by God for our good, they are an opportunity for Him to demonstrate his love to us and grow our trust in him. We often face temptations to sin while in our trials, but those temptations do not come from God. Temptations to sin come from our own evil desires. Like a fish pondering the attraction of a lure, we go from feeling, to thinking, to choosing to follow our sinful natures. While persevering in trials leads us to spiritual maturity, which is priceless; giving in to temptation leads us down the path of sin which leads to death. Trials can be wonderfully beneficial for us if endured with steadfastness or they can be terribly destructive for us if we choose to follow the temptations of our sinful desires while in a trial.

This morning, as we cap off this section, we are looking at a particular kind of trial. These are trials that last a long time. These are the kinds of trials that are extremely bitter. When going through those kind of trials, let's be honest, don't we begin to question God's character? Don't we question God's purposes for allowing the trial to last so long? When the trials of life seem to never end, don't we begin to doubt God has a good purpose for allowing them? After a while, don't we begin to doubt God is even there? This morning, we are talking about what to do when trials last a long time?

James 1:16-18

Don't be deceived!

James begins with an admonition. Don't be deceived. Why do you think he starts that way? When trials are long and hard, it is easy to be deceived. It is

interesting the way James writes because many Bible scholars believed the word *deception* in the mind of his Jewish audience brought their memories back to the original deception that took place between Satan and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" Genesis 3:1 (ESV)

Satan's implication was that if God were *truly* good, he would let you eat from *all* the trees, without exception. Satan wanted Eve to question God's character and purposes for her life. Satan wanted Eve to believe she knew what was good for her better than God knew what was good for her. Satan wanted Eve to think she would be better off trusting her wisdom than God's wisdom for her life.

Thousands of years later Satan is still telling us to question the goodness of God's character and purposes for our lives. He is still telling us we know better than God does. Sickness comes, a loved one dies, friends fail, conflicts mushrooms; and our sinful heart is easily deceived into saying, "If God were really good, he wouldn't let this happen."

This is important. Once Satan convinced Eve to question the goodness of God's character and to believe she could create better plans for her life than God did; that was the gap Satan needed to get the human race to fall into sin.

James pleads with us, when in a trial, don't be deceived into doubting the goodness of God as Eve was so long ago. It is when we doubt the goodness of God's character and intentions for us that we fall into sin.

Say it with me. *“Don’t be deceived. God is being good to me, even when I don’t feel it.”* In the remainder of these verses, James gives us three reasons why we can know, with confidence, God is being good to us, even when we can’t feel it.

Don’t be deceived - God is the source of every good and perfect gift.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above,... James 1:17 (ESV)

Look at your life right now, what good is in it? Are you married? Give God the credit! Do you have a roof over your head? Do you have food on the table? Most of us have more than enough food on the table! Do you have your health? Do you have children? Many couples can not have children? Do you have a job? Do you have an education? Do you have a car? Do you have a business? Do you have a functional mind? Every good thing you have is from God!

The source and giver of every good gift is God. Satan, can not and does not give good gifts. God is the source of every good thing in our lives.

The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. Psalm 145:9 (ESV)

Even if you do not know Christ this morning, any good you have in your life is a gift from God. There is no more important truth to weld into our minds when facing temptation. *As a child of God, every time I think God’s words and God’s plans are not for my good,... I am deceived!*

Every moral decision we make hinges on this question. Do I believe God is good in all he commands or do I believe I can come up with a plan that is better?

When God says forgive as we have been forgiven, do I believe that it is not only the right thing to do but it is the *good for me* thing to do?... because God is good and everything he does it good.

When God says in Malachi, “I hate divorce.” do I believe he says that for my good? Do I believe his plans are best and that it is better to work it out rather than break it off. When God says that, do I believe that it is because he is good?

When God says

...older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. 1 Timothy 5:2 (ESV)

Teenagers, when God says don't do anything with your girlfriend that you wouldn't do with your sister, do you believe God is saying that for your good, or do you think you can improve on God's plan for your date this weekend? Every time, we tell ourselves God does not have the good plan and I have a better one, I am doing the exact same thing Eve did in the Garden of Eden.

Listen to this.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32 (ESV)

If God loves us enough to send his own son to die for us, why would his plans not be for our good in all things? I talk to people all the time about this and you can watch the wheels turning in their head because they are afraid to obey God because they think God's plans are not for their good. Do you believe God is good and his plans can be trusted?

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. Psalm 100:5 (ESV)

Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Psalm 106:1 (ESV)

Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Psalm 34:8 (ESV)

If God is good, everything he does is worthy of approval.

When we say God is good, it means everything he does is worthy of approval, even the things we don't understand. We must realize that our ability to judge what is good is limited. This reminds us of the story of Joseph in the Bible. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. Joseph was betrayed by Potiphar's wife. Joseph spent a fair amount of time in the dungeon even though he did the right thing, he was treated as if he did the wrong thing. Was God good all the time? Were God's plans for Joseph good all the time? Yes! It was years later when God raised him to second in command of all of Egypt that Joseph was able to gain a vantage point from which he could see how God was good all the way through his life.

For each of us, if we judge God by the circumstances we face in the moment, very few of us will call him good, because we can't see the end of what he is doing. The fact remains, do we in faith trust that since God is the source of every good thing? Will we, in faith, believe that God's purposes for us are always good, even when we can't figure out how his plan comes together? Unless we weld that into our mind, we will leap into temptation every time we feel we have a plan better than God's. *God is good, all the time, even when I can't see it.*

I know some of you are thinking about an event in your life that was extremely painful. You are saying, “God, how can that experience ever be good?” Perhaps this will help:

A bad thing that produces a greater good is, in the eyes of God, worthy of His approval.

Let me explain it this way. Have you been to the dentist? I love dentists, especially when they come to church. I don’t love dentists when I am in their chair and they have a drill in their hand! When the dentist tells me I have a cavity, it is not exciting. If you are like me, you would rather ignore the cavity. If I ignore the cavity now, I will go through horrific pain later. Is it good to go through the pain of a filling a cavity now rather than enduring the pain of an infected nerve later? Yes! Why go to the dentist? The bad pain of a filing now is producing a greater good later.

We do this for a lot more than the dentist. Kids, you go through the pain of studying now, because you don’t want the pain of unemployment later. We go through the pain of saving money now because we don’t want the pain of borrowing money and paying interest on it later.

Perhaps the greatest example of this is the cross. For Christ, the cross was a great deal of pain on the front end, but it produced an incredible amount of glory and honor to God on the back end, including the salvation of our souls.

I remember being at a men’s retreat once when I was a teenager and the man who got up to speak was battling terminal cancer. One of the things he shared was his struggle to believe in the goodness toward him in all things, especially in the cancer. Finally he realized, *he doesn’t get to determine the way*

God will be good. He just knows God will always be good to him. If God chose to heal him, he would be good. If God chose to bring him home to glory, God is still good. However God worked his cancer out, God would be good when he did it. He didn't get to define God's plans for his life. He just has to trust God's good character and love toward him.

It is not easy to look at the trials of life and say God is good, his purposes and plans for me are good. In the long, dark valleys of despair, one of the greatest acts of faith we will ever do is to refuse to be deceived into doubting God's goodness. *God is good, all the time, even when I can't feel it.*

Don't be deceived - God's goodness never changes.

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. James 1:17 (ESV)

This is cryptic language, isn't it? James calls God the Father of lights. Sounds like he is decorating a Christmas tree. Where does this title come from? It is from the field of astronomy. James reminds us that God created the stars and the planets of the universe. James' purpose is not to simply tell us God created the stars and scattered them through the sky. James is contrasting God with the heavenly bodies.

Since creation began, one thing we can count on with the sun, moon and stars is their constant change. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west. The moon is a full-moon, half-moon and a quarter-moon. Even the stars in the sky are not in the same positions every night. While the heavenly bodies are constantly changing, the God who created the heavenly bodies is never

changing. He has no moving parts. God is unchangeable, he has no shadows or variation.

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end. Psalm 102:25–27 (ESV)

“For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. Malachi 3:6 (ESV)

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8 (ESV)

We can't even understand something that never changes. Everything and everyone in our experience changes. This summer, Cindy and I will celebrate our 18th anniversary. Even though it doesn't feel like much time has past, you tell me, have we changed?

Hairstyles change. Fashions change. It is depressing to realize I am the age my parents were when I was in high school.



We don't have a mental category for something that never changes, yet that is true of God. He never changes. Not only does God never grow old, but *his purposes for us* never change for us. *His love for us* never changes. *His goodness toward us* never changes. Here is the temptation we face. When things are going well, we think God loves us. When our life derails like Jobs', we think God's purposes for us have changed, especially when we feel we deserve to have his purposes change.

God's purposes for us do not change.

Don't be deceived - God alone is behind the supreme act of goodness.

Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. James 1:18 (ESV)

There is much in this verse we will *not* have time to explore. James reminds us God alone is the source of the greatest gift of all, our salvation through Christ.

Let's begin with this phrase, *...of his own will he brought us forth...*

Understand this, if you have trusted Christ as your savior, that was not originally a decision you made. *God chose to love you first*. He chose to soften your heart so you could see the truth of Jesus and trust in him.

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:12–13 (ESV)

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— Ephesians 2:4–5 (ESV)

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44 (ESV)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit... John 15:16 (ESV)

Think of it this way. Salvation is like having a baby. A baby doesn't decide to be conceived and born. It is by the will and action of parents that a baby comes about. The child's role is ultimately passive, not active. Ultimately, salvation is completely a gift of God. As God regenerates us we turn to him and trust in him. Does this come from ourselves? No, it all begins with God and his goodness. Here is the logic.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Romans 8:32 (ESV)

Look at the cross of Christ and see the incredible price God paid to give us salvation. He did it all simply out of the goodness of His heart. If God did not spare his own son to be good to us in salvation, how can we question his goodness toward us in everything else? How can we doubt God's goodness to us in the future after we see what he gave us in the past through Jesus?

Dear friends, don't be deceived, like Eve, into believing God doesn't have your best interests at heart, even in trials. His purposes are unchanging. We don't get to determine how God will be good to us, we just know that as his children he is being good to us. We can't see the end of God's plan from the beginning. We just know he is worthy of our trust, because he is good in all things all the time and his purpose never changes.

Conclusion

Is it possible we are on this verse today because the Holy Spirit knows you are struggling to believe God is good? Are you struggling to believe God's words and warning come from the absolute goodness of God toward you?

I began by saying it is hard to believe God is good when we are in a long and difficult trial. We judge someones greatness by the size of the obstacles they overcome. Climbing to the top of the stairs is not impressive, climbing Mount Everest is. Vaulting 6 feet is fun to watch. Vaulting 20 feet makes history. The greater the obstacle, the greater the glory to the one who overcomes it. It is no different for God.

God loves to bring things that are incredibly good, out of situations that are incredibly bad. He did this with our salvation. We deserved eternal, conscious, punishment for our sin, but through Jesus, he adopts us as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, the most exalted position of the universe.

Since the universe exists to display God's glory, why would it be out of character for God to allow us to face long and difficult trials, and just when it seems all hope is lost, to snatch us from the ashes of defeat and use us as a grand display of his underserved grace and mercy. He loves to take lives that are broken and make them beautiful.

The greater the darkness, the more audacious the trial, the greater the glory God gets when, in his goodness, he redeems us from it; either in this life or in the next. My friends, expect trials that are long and hard. Don't lose hope. God will always be good to us in them. Expect God's amazing resurrection in the most hopeless moments, because that is what he loves to do. *God is good, all the time, even when I can't feel it.*



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