

The changeless God in changing times * James 1:16-18

Father's Day (June 17, 2018) * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

If you think back to last week, you'll recall that the gist of my kids message was this – although things have changed a lot in the last 150 years, God has not and we can trust His steadfast faithfulness in our lives. Washing machines have changed, but God hasn't and we can trust that He will continue to be faithful to us.

Now that's fine for a kids' message, but the more I thought about it, the more I wanted to press into it. The more I wanted to dig into this idea of God's unchanging faithfulness, because I know that it is tremendously relevant to us in this congregation.

I know from conversations with many of you that there are many changes going on in your lives. Marital and family realities are changing. You're thinking about a new job. You're thinking about moving. Your health has changed in some way and now you're left dealing with the new realities.

How does God's unchanging nature affect the way that we deal with these changes?

How does God's unchanging nature help us as we navigate the changes in our lives?

To explore that this morning, I want to dig into a passage that I kind of glossed over the first time we saw it in the book of James. Those three verses that Janet read to us are a treasure and we're going to spend our time this morning thinking about how God's unchanging nature helps us in changing times. Now this message will be shorter than some others because we're only working with three verses but I think that they are three verses that we really need to hear.

Because, listen, I know, that in the midst of changing circumstances, it can be really easy to get bogged down and wonder if maybe God's forgotten about you. It can be very easy to question whether or not God really cares.

And so James opens this passage with a really powerful corrective. Verse 16, chapter 1 – My beloved brothers and sisters – don't be deceived.

(Don't be deceived my dear brothers and sisters.)

Don't let your circumstances sway you.

Don't let the devil fool you.

Don't let discouragement derail you.

Don't be deceived.

God will always be our life-giving Father.

Now he doesn't use those exact words, but that's the gist of what he's saying. Though everything else around you may be changing, God will not and He will always be our life-giving Father. He will never fail

you. He will never forsake you. Even in the darkest times, He is at work giving life and working for God in our circumstances. God will always be our life-giving Father.

That's the big idea for this passage and James makes that point through a series of three statements –

God always gives good gifts.

God never changes.

God has already given us eternal life.

James tells us these three things – (God always...) – put that together and you come away with this – God will always be our life-giving father.

So let's explore this together, starting with this – God always gives perfect gifts. Look at verse 17 -

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the Heavenly lights...

This is very important for us to hear.

Sometimes when things get tough, we start to doubt God's goodness. We start to wonder if maybe God has run out of good gifts and now all He's got to give is lemons and coal. Or maybe we start to think that God is arbitrarily throwing some affliction at us. But listen to what the Bible says – every good and perfect gift comes from above.

Everything that is good comes from God. There is no good thing that doesn't ultimately have its origin in God and the reason for that is that God is by His very nature is good (Martin 39).

Even the way that James describes God implies that – what does he call Him here? The Father of the Heavenly Lights. Now what do you think James, a Jewish person through and through is thinking about when he calls God that? Creation. Genesis 1. God created the sun and moon, the Heavenly lights and the sky that hosts them, He gave life to everything – and what was the verdict on everything He made? This is all GOOD. The God who is good made everything – and it was good.

And what's more, God's goodness was not just limited to Creation, it is ongoing in our lives today. When James says 'Every good and perfect gift is coming down from above,' he pictures these good gifts coming down to us in an ongoing, continuous action, implying that God is constantly pouring out His blessing on us, the way that water is constantly pouring over Niagara Falls.

God always gives good gifts.

And what's more, He will always give good gifts because God never changes. Look again at verse 17 –

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows (James 1:17).

There it is right there – God never changes – and the imagery there is quite striking – He does not change like shifting shadows.

Have you ever been swimming somewhere and realized a mottled cloud pattern was passing overhead? One minute it's lovely and warm and the next minute, it's cold and dark – all depending on the clouds as they shift past the sun?

Well, James says, that's the opposite of God. There is no cloud that blocks out His blessing, there is no shadow that can prevent His love from reaching us – God is 100%, every moment, every day radiating His warmth and goodness and blessing on us and that will never change.

As Alec Motyer says: There is no way in which we might come to him in our need and find that he is unwilling, unable or unavailable. The gifts come from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change (56).

The sun, the moon, the stars, our circumstances: they are constantly in motion, but God is always the same, steadfastly committed to the wellbeing of His people.

God always gives good gifts and God never changes.

But how do we know that? How can we as Christians in the midst of changing circumstances know that our unchanging, gift giving God will continue to give us life?

Well James says, that's easy – we can know that because - God has already given us eternal life.

Verse 18 –

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (Jam 1:18 NIV).

God always gives good gifts and the good-est gift of all is eternal life. If you have turned from self and received that gift, then God has made you eternally secure. God gave His one and only Son to bear the cost of sin and restore us to relationship with Him, so that we could live eternally with Him. And if God is that concerned about your eternal wellbeing, you can be absolutely certain that He is concerned with your everyday wellbeing in this life.

If you have received the gift of eternal life, it's because God has chosen to pour out His blessing on you and chosen to commit Himself to you and nothing can change that. There is nothing shaky about our salvation – verse 18 – God Himself chose to give us birth – nobody, nothing can reverse that. When commit to following Jesus, He commits Himself irrevocably to us.

Paul puts it perfectly at the end of Romans chapter 8 –

Though we face ... trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword...

...

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,

39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The fact that God has already committed Himself to us for the next life means we can trust Him in this one.

He always gives good gifts.

He never changes.

He has already given us eternal life.

God will always be our life-giving Father.

Let me try to bring this home.

I know that many of us here have seen pretty major changes in our lives recently, and if you haven't, they're coming.

Your lived reality is not what it is a year ago, six months ago, six weeks ago – but your Father in Heaven is exactly the same.

He always give good gifts. His posture towards you is always that of grace and mercy and blessing. God is not arbitrarily sending hardship your way and frankly the cancers and hardships and heartbreaks of this life are not from God; they are simply the realities of living in a fallen world. But listen, even in those circumstances, God is at work for good, refining us, renewing us, giving us good gifts that enable us to persevere in the midst of it all.

And there is nothing that will change that. The death of a spouse, the loss of a job – that doesn't mean that God has suddenly changed or lost His authority. It doesn't mean that God has changed His mind about you or abandoned you. It simply means that something has changed in our world and that the unchanging God is at work for good in the midst of it.

And we can know that because He has already given us eternal life. He has given His Son to secure our eternal wellbeing; He will certainly work for good in this life.

If you are feeling overwhelmed by the circumstances of life right now, 16 Don't be deceived. Don't let your circumstances shape how you feel about God; let God shape how you feel about your circumstances.

17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

He will always be our life-giving Father.

Now you may have noticed that I didn't go into detail on verse 18 but that's because I wanted to use it here. Let's listen to it again.

He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created (James 1:18 NIV).

We are here, gathered at the table as redeemed brothers and sisters, children of the never changing, ever blessing Father, because GOD Himself chose to redeem us.

He chose to give us new life, not because of the good things that we have done, but because He is rich in mercy and steadfast love. He chose to take on flesh and suffer the death our sin deserved, so that we could receive the life that He deserved.

We become His children when we receive this word of truth – that we were sinners, putting our own interests before God's interests but God intervened to forgive our sin and give us new life.

And the reason He did that is really interesting. He chose to give us new birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first fruits of all he created.

You know what that means? He gave us new life so that people could see in us a foretaste of eternity. He saved us so that people would look at us and see joy in the midst of trials, confidence in the midst of change, grace in the midst of a selfish culture and realize 'this is what eternity will be like. I want that.'

If you affirm that all of this is true – that we were sinners, that Jesus died to redeem sinners like you and me, that you have entrusted your life to Him to show what eternal life will look like – then you are welcome at this Table. If you haven't made that commitment yet, then just let the bread and the cup pass you by because these are precious symbols of an authentic relationship with God. I would ask you to hold onto the bread and we will receive it together and the same with the cup. First though, let us pray.

Pray - 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. (Joh 15:13 NIV). Jesus, thank You for showing us what true love is. You laid down Your life for us. You allowed Your body to be broken for us. Not because You HAD to but because You chose to. You chose to take our place and give us new life. Thank You for that. Help us to love others that way too. Amen.

The night that Jesus was betrayed, he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Let us remember.

Let's pray.

Jesus, we are grateful for the way that You have committed Yourself to us. You are no fairweather friend – You have sealed a covenant with us with Your blood, a promise that You will never fail us or forsake us. Give us grateful hearts Lord, and help us to live grateful lives. Amen.

20 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Do this in remembrance of me.

"Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins