

Day 4

James 1.12-18

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above...

James has already assured us that God is singularly generous and gives wisdom to those who ask. In these seven verses he attests to three more of God's qualities and two further actions which he performs, one future and one past. Before reading on you might care to identify these for yourself.

This section begins with another reference to steadfastness under trial, which returns us to vv.2-4. In those verses James described the effect that steadfast faith has upon us, preparing us to be made perfect when Christ appears. In v. 12 he announces that at that time Christ will present us with the crown of life - the symbol of the blessing of eternal life which the faithful will receive as citizens of Christ's eternal kingdom (see 2 Tim 4.8; Rev 2.10).

Having dealt with trials from without, which are a cause for rejoicing, James turns to temptations which arise within, which are no cause for rejoicing. While we know that Satan is the ultimate source of all evil and temptation to sin, James does not allow us to blame him for our faithlessness. Satan it is who invites us to sin, but it is our own desire that leads us to accept the invitation, to allow the seed of sin to be planted within us. That seed then conceives, is born (as sin), grows, and matures till it brings forth death. This is the reverse of the what happens when we desire Christ, accepting the invitation to faith. When faith conceives it gives birth to steadfastness, which grows to maturity, bringing forth perfection and life eternal (vv.3-4).

James is more concerned with defending God's character than giving Satan any credit for our sin. He affirms that God, by his very nature, is unable either to be tempted or to tempt. In describing him as the Father of lights (the sun, moon and stars), he sets him above them, not only as their creator but as one whose brightness does not vary in intensity as theirs does, according to seasons or phases (of the moon). Echoing John, he describes God as the one in whom there is no darkness at all (see 1 John 1.5), not even a shadow. On the contrary, God gives only those things which are good and perfect, and they come from him alone.

As well as differing from Satan and fallen humanity in his nature (i.e. perfectly good), God differs in his purpose for his creation. Whereas Satan's purpose is "only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10.10), God's purpose is only good – to redeem creation, restoring it to wholeness (*shalom*) by ridding it of sin, suffering and death. James again invokes the metaphor of birth: we are born again ("brought forth") by the completed work of Jesus Christ (the Word of Truth). As first generation Jewish members of the Church James designates his readers, and himself, as among the firstfruits of those who are saved. That's not a title we can share, but we are no less brought forth by the Word of Truth and co-heirs of God's blessings in Christ - assuming we hold fast to the Word.

To ponder

James extols God's pure, perfect character and purposes. Do you ever doubt these things?

To pray

Heavenly Father, I praise and thank you for who you are, the Father of lights and giver of all good things, who has brought me by a new birth into your family. Grant me to know and share in the desires of your heart, that I might follow them and not my own, for I ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

