

SERMON

James 1:16-18

The Father of Every Good and Perfect Gift

Nunawading and Waverley, 13-3-22

Dear friends in Christ,

We know about both good and bad gifts. Good gifts, such as a handy tool, reliable appliance, a necklace that is an heirloom, are admired and treasured by us. Sometimes a gift breaks down the first time we use it. Someone who grudgingly gives something, makes a perfectly good thing into something bad. There can be danger in the gift itself, such as a drug. That is why we are told about deception: **Do not be deceived my beloved brothers and sisters.** Just as God does not arrange things to tempt us, nor does he give anything to us to hurt us. Even difficult experiences build our character, hope and trust in him.

We see before us perfect gifts, gifts that create health, help us to earn an income, provide shelter, and nourish our bodies and our minds. Good films, literature and art, and technology are **perfect gifts.** When in hospital, how grateful we are for advances in surgery and medicine. It is true: **Every good thing given and every perfect gift comes down from the Father of the heavenly lights.**

Our Father gives continually, never holding back or stopping and starting in an unreliable way. **There is no change or shifting shadow** about him at all. As the earth spins and shadows lengthen at morning and night or the moon goes through its phases, and the seasons change, we know and believe that the Lord is not governed by changing emotions but by a constant love, that is, he is faithful. He remains true to his good earth, faithful to each of us, caring and supplying our every need, every day, week, year and decade. Let us always depend on him and trust him.

He gives unconditionally, as Jesus said, **sending rain and sunshine on the evil as well as the righteous.** James speaks of gifts **coming down** like rain. As Christians, we can see the continual flow of God's goodness to the world: bees pollinate orchards, the emergency workers help in a crisis and the safety net of social security and compulsory superannuation support us. The Lord's giving is not based on our decency or behaviour at all but on his grace, his undeserved love for us.

The **heavenly lights** remind us of the beauty and scope of the Father's continuous giving. Way back just milli seconds after the Big Bang, light energy called gamma rays collided into each other producing protons; some matter, some anti-matter. They annihilated each other in an instant returning to gamma rays. By some miracle of design, our Father built something in to the early universe that tipped the balance so that slightly more matter than anti-matter was formed thus resulting in a universe. And here we are with brains configured in such a way that we can understand the maths and physics behind it all. As far as we know, there is only one creature in the universe who can perceive the mind of God and unlock his secrets because he has aligned our minds with his.

Just as he exercised his will to bring this mighty universe into being and give it powers to expand and produce life, so we know that in Christ he has given us even higher gifts. Just as he gave birth to the universe, the Father has given us new birth in the womb of baptism so that we are like lords who inherit his creation. James calls us **the first fruits amongst the creatures**. The apostle John wrote: **God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. The person who has the Son has life.** The universe is limited but as the first fruits of Jesus resurrection, we become unlimited and eternal.

New birth through the life-giving gospel of Christ gives us perspective. Not all Christians are blessed continuously with every good gift. There are times in our own lives when we struggle with hardship, illness, loss of work or fluctuations in income. The life of Christ that is in us helps us to endure, as Christians have done through poverty, war, injury and other catastrophes. The floods in NSW and Queensland are the result of an earth that is still growing, laying down new soil and alluvial plains but it is not the Father's will that we be in the way of danger. However, even if we make mistakes, he calls us **the first fruits**, the appearance of the new season's crop, the beginning of a great harvest of humanity fought for and won by Christ himself. That life within us is the source of our hope in troubling times.

Today, we are so thankful for God's giving of perfect gifts for us.