

How do you feel when you work hard to help others - and no one seems to appreciate you? Who is the one Person who is most unappreciated of all? Isn't it God? Now, if we feel hurt when people take us for granted, how do you suppose God feels since few take time to appreciate Him? What if He sulked in the corner of heaven? What if He went on strike? The sun would stop shining - no more heat and light for the earth! The rain would not fall, and the rivers and wells would run dry. The plants would stop producing oxygen and every living creature would breathe its last!

Yet God continues to supply us with all we need for time and eternity in His marvelous grace! So as we pause on this national day of Thanksgiving may the Holy Spirit move us to say, **“Thank You, Lord!”** 1) **Thank you, Lord, for *only* good things come from you.** 2) **Thank you, Lord, for good things come *only* from you.**

Is it really true that only good things come from the Lord? It wasn't easy for the people in James' day to believe that. They were feeling painful afflictions as believers in Jesus. James wrote earlier in this chapter, **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance...Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life God has promised to those who love him” (v. 2, 12).** They might have thought, “God, why do you allow suffering in the first place? Why don't you take the evil away?” Is God truly good? Then how do you account for the bad in the world? Is God the cause of evil? If so, then he is not good. If God doesn't want evil, yet it is here, then is God really the almighty Ruler over all things? Is He really in control?

To answer the question about evil, James had written in v. 13, **“When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me,’ for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.”** God is holy, and He tempts no one to sin. Temptation and evil can come only from the pit of hell, and from the sinful desires that rage within us.

Yet what is God's attitude toward us? **“Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.”** In the beginning He created the heavens and the earth. He created it so wonderfully, intricately, delicately. If

the earth were any closer to the sun, it would be a furnace. If it were any further, we'd be in a deep freeze. God created this vast world of ours and all its wonders as the perfect home for man and woman, whom He created in His own image. Adam and Eve could live forever under God's will. Life on earth, in harmony with the heavenly Father, was indeed Paradise! After He created all He Himself declared, "It is *very good*."

We, on the other hand, responded to God's perfect gifts with rebellion. We, in our first parents, Adam and Eve, are responsible for the sin, ill, and death in the world. We would face an eternity in the horrible outer darkness of hell - the place where the torment of the damned rises forever and ever, where there is nothing good! But God loved us and gave us the gift of His only-begotten Son, the perfect Savior. He sent Him to bear our sin's curse on the cross so that God might graciously forgive us. **"He chose to give us birth through the word of truth" (v. 18).** God gave us the gift of His Holy Spirit through His Means of Grace, the Gospel in Word and in Baptism and the Lord's Supper. By the Spirit's miracle we trust in Jesus for eternal life. We receive God's pardon and peace through faith that the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin. God has given us the gift of eternal life.

But what about the trials and ills of this present age? True, God does permit them. He even sends them to help us see the ravages of sin. Through trial He **teaches us that Paradise is here no more**. He keeps us **yearning for the heavenly home**. He uses trials to lead us to repent of pride and to **seek God in his holy Word**. By the Gospel we cling to as our ultimate and only lasting comfort, the Holy Spirit keeps us in the true faith on the path of life. He also uses tragedy in this world to lead us **to reach out to others with compassion**. He teaches us to serve Him as stewards of the many gifts He has entrusted to us. So we don't spend our lives consuming things, but using things to God's glory and praise. *Thank you, Lord, for only good things come from you!*

Now remember, all these good things come *only* from God. Is it my intelligence or ability that brings blessings to my life? Is it my nation's natural resources, economy, ability to produce food, or military strength that gives ensures I receive my many blessings? Are not rather these things all gifts from God? He causes the sun to shine, the rain to fall. He gives the soil its nutrients and gives us our crops in season. He created us with our talents and abilities. He gave us a nation founded on principles of God's Word, so that our military strength can still be used to defend freedom, our freedom to worship God and spread His word! Whatever blessings you have received or shall ever receive from now into eternity come from God, the one true God, the Triune God. The Lord urges us through Moses' words to Israel 1450 B.C.: **"You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my**

hands have produced this wealth for me.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms His covenant which He swore to your forefathers as it is today" (Deuteronomy 8:17-18).

Think of the even greater blessings God has in store for us when we, his sanctified children, seek to fulfill His will in faith in and love for Jesus. What happens when we regularly attend worship and Bible study? **"Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it"** (Luke 11:28). When we receive the Lord's Supper often in humble faith? **"This is my body given for you... This cup is my blood poured out for you."** What a gift - Jesus own body and blood to forgive us and renew our faith! When we cultivate a life of prayer and family devotions? **"Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you"** (Matthew 7:7). When we live to God's glory and seek His kingdom, His rule of grace for ourselves & others? **"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"** (Matthew 6:33). When we bring our offerings, in proportion to what God has given us? **"God is able to make all grace abound to you so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work"** (2 Corinthians 9:8). When we witness and work to bring the gospel to others? **"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever"** (Daniel 12:3).

Thank the Lord, for all good gifts come only from Him! Learn to be content – and thankful. May I tell you the story of Mr. Roth? He was an old man who showed up at the back door of a house some college students were renting. At first they were suspicious, for he stood there clutching a wicker basket. In it lay a few unappealing vegetables. He bid them a good morning - and offered his produce for sale. They quickly bought some to simply get him off the step. But he kept returning each week. He said he was the man who lived in the shack down the road. Cataracts made him nearly blind. On some visits he would shuffle in, wearing two mismatched right shoes. He would pull out his harmonica, and with glazed eyes set on a future gory, puff out old gospel tunes between conversations about vegetables and religion. On one visit he exclaimed, "The Lord is so good! I came out of my shack this morning, and found a bag full of shoes and clothing on my porch." "That's wonderful, Mr. Roth!" the students rejoiced and his good fortune. "You know what's even more wonderful?" Mr. Roth continued. "Just yesterday I met some people that could really use them."

What can we learn from Mr. Roth? Maybe many of my "needs" really are no more than "wants." Maybe my "Thank you, Lord" hasn't sounded out very clearly in the way I live and give. But look how wonderfully blessed we

are! God takes care of us daily in this life. He will provide an eternal home in heaven! Could there be a more joyful, more contented, more satisfied more generous people on earth than we? Give thanks to the Lord! Only good gifts come from Him. Good gifts come only from Him. Amen.