

"God Is Good - Always"

Text: James 1:17-22

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." Amen. (Colossians 3:16-17 ESV)

Dear Fellow Christians:

Life in this sinful world is – what's the word – treacherous. It is always shifting and unstable. Nothing temporal is ever completely reliable. I'm sure this is nothing new to any of you, but God help us if we fail to acknowledge and appreciate that fact, and even more so if we fail to act upon this understanding. Since life on earth is so unstable, we need a special place to center ourselves, a sure horizon on which to focus. We need something solid and permanent, a certain, unchanging point of reference and stability. The hymn writer put it well:

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see.
O Thou who changest not, abide with me!*

There is one such place of certainty and security. That one sure, certain point of reference is now, and always will be, our unchanging God and his perfect Word. There, in his Word, we can always find consistency amid the chaos, confidence in a world of apprehension, serenity in the midst of anxiety.

We turn therefore once again this morning to a study of that Word of God, and this morning we find some rock solid words that are intended to provide us that elusive certainty, comfort, and confidence that we crave. They remind us that not only does our God never change, he is always good. Always. The text on which we will base our study this morning is found in the Epistle of James, the First Chapter:

^{ESV} ***James 1:17-22*** ***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. ¹⁸ Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. ¹⁹ ¶ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be***

quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰ for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² ¶ But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

So far the perfect, holy, certain words of our God. Ingest these words. Take them in and make them your own, for they are indeed the words of eternal life. In reverent awe of the goodness of our God, and trusting that he will continue to benefit from that goodness through the study of his Word this morning, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us by Your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!"*** Amen.

You've probably heard the expression many times. Some of you have probably used it, maybe often: *"God is good."* That's true, of course, but the disturbing part is when we use that phrase pretty much only when we get what we want, or when things seem to be going our way. Sort of like saying *"God answers prayer"* but only saying that when his answer is yes. God *always* answers the prayers of his children. It's just that sometimes the answer is no. So also God is *always* good, even when what is going on in our lives isn't necessarily what we had in mind.

The same principal applies when we say one of our common table prayers: *"Oh give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good..."* Ask yourself what, if anything, you mean when you repeat that prayer. Do you ever consider what it really means when you say, *"God is good"*?

Obviously mortal man cannot fully grasp all there is to our God. We know some things, but even there that knowledge is imperfect. Our own spiritual laziness makes that partly our own fault whenever we fail to study God's Word and thereby fail to learn what he wants to teach us about himself. In sort of a detached way we know, for example, that our God is good and merciful and patient – his Word tells us so. Yet when do we stop to consider those essential attributes of our God and what they really mean? The fact is when we invest little thought or study on the subject, our initial understanding is probably going to be that God's goodness, patience, and mercy all pretty much refer to the same thing. They don't.

God's goodness, for example, is different in that it extends to every single living thing, and has since the first moment of creation. It is part of God's essential nature, which means that he cannot be anything

other than good. Our text begins: **"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."** The goodness of God toward every living thing is evident, in the first place, because of the *existence* of every living thing. Both life itself and the preservation of that life is a gift from our Creator. Every living thing can and should therefore sing the praise of its Creator.

Be honest with yourself here and you will immediately begin to recognize that which is arguably the single greatest threat to mankind today – believer and unbeliever alike: apathy. How did you, personally, receive this reminder of God's goodness? With excitement and heartfelt gratitude, or with a yawn?

Apathy (indifference) is born the moment we start to feel detached from something, when we feel that the subject under discussion really doesn't affect or threaten us, and therefore isn't really relevant or important. Think of it this way. You are headed to northern Minnesota for a camping vacation. Which would interest you more, a pamphlet that describes the danger of encountering alligators in the wild, or bears? The fact is we mentally categorize all the information offered to us as relevant or irrelevant, and we simply dismiss the latter. Most North Dakotans couldn't care less about alligators because they pose no real personal threat.

Shift back to God's goodness. Apathy sets in (in connection with God's goodness) in part, because of God's *consistent* goodness. We don't see any danger in connection with God's goodness because God has always been consistently good to us in every conceivable way. Yet that, in itself, is sin. It is wicked in God's eyes not only to take his goodness for granted, but to fail to acknowledge that goodness and to thank him for it. Again the passage from 1 Chronicles 16:34 that forms our table prayer: **"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy (literally: his steadfast love) endures forever!"**

To help us to better recognize the problem here, compare and contrast God's goodness with his patience and mercy. They're not all the same thing. First of all, while God's goodness was obvious from the moment of creation, we would know nothing at all about God's patience and mercy if we hadn't sinned. Had we never sinned, God would still be patient and merciful, but we would have no reason to know that. The once sinless Adam and Eve had no reason to concern themselves with either God's patience or his mercy. These were two aspects of his goodness that simply didn't apply to them.

That all came to a screeching halt the instant they sinned. In fact it could be argued that from the moment they first sinned, no other attributes of God held greater relevance to sinful man than his patience and his mercy.

The two are not the same, by the way. God exercises patience on or toward *himself*. He exercises mercy toward *us*. Both are necessary, and both serve as the best antidote for apathy.

Again, apathy is born whenever we feel detached from something. God's patience and mercy, when rightly understood, absolutely crush apathy. How?

Not only do both God's patience and mercy affect us, both inform us of a profound and looming danger. Go back to the idea of alligators in northern Minnesota. Doesn't matter, right? Not until you pull your canoe onto a beach in the Boundary Waters and are confronted by a hungry 18 footer. The problem with spiritual apathy is that Satan has convinced our society that almost *nothing* is a threat *because almost nothing today is seen as sinful*. Even if it is, sin itself is portrayed as posing no threat. But the problem actually goes deeper than that.

Satan loves it when we recognize and acknowledge the sins of others, not our own. Married people do that when we condemn living together without being married. That's a sin, of course, but we are comfortable calling it that because it's someone else's sin – just as gay marriage, drug abuse, abortion, and pedophilia are "other peoples'" sins, and therefore other peoples' problems. We tend to be comfortable with such things, even self-righteous. We're much less comfortable when the shotgun of the law is pointed directly at our own hearts.

The reality is God doesn't just have to be patient with others; he has to be patient with *us*. He doesn't just have to have mercy on others; he has to have mercy on *us*. In fact we really don't need to look any farther than our treatment of, or appreciation for, God's goodness.

Every single time we grumble or complain, God has to impose patience on himself and mercy toward us. Every time we fail to acknowledge his goodness in every aspect of our day-to-day lives, God has to impose patience on himself and mercy toward us. Every time we are filled with apprehension about the future we are demonstrating a sinful disrespect of God's perpetual goodness, and God has to impose patience on himself and mercy toward us.

Scripture Readings

Do you imagine that this still poses no looming threat and is therefore grounds for indifference? Then know the other difference between God's goodness and his patience and mercy: God's goodness will never end; his patience and mercy over against continued rebellion will. God will remain absolutely and consistently good in heaven, but there there will be no exercise of his patience or mercy. There will be no need when sin is replaced by perfection. There God will receive only that which is perfect.

Here is where the terror for us begins and apathy is crushed. This doesn't apply just to others; it applies to *me*. God demands perfection *from me*, a perfection that I am absolutely incapable of providing.

This is the hard cold place where the law must take us to crush our Godless apathy. Only when we first come to *this* place can the gospel hold any meaning, relevance, or genuine comfort. Then the gospel isn't making promises to someone else; it is making promises to *me*. We could not and cannot provide the perfection that God demands, but Jesus has provided it for us. Jesus achieved perfection during his life on earth, never once sinning. He then gave his perfect life on the cross not as payment for his own sins, for he had none, but as payment for our sins. God the Father accepted Jesus' perfect life as payment for the sins of the world – every single one. He proved it by raising Jesus from the dead and returning him to his side in heaven. That sin payment is now yours through faith in his Son – in trusting that Jesus provided every bit of goodness necessary for you to enter heaven. You, personally, are saved not by any goodness you provide, but through faith or trust in that Savior who provided all necessary goodness in your place, as your substitute.

This is why God has imposed patience upon himself when he sees all of *our* sin and ungratefulness. This is why he has shown *us* mercy, not punishing us as we deserved. It is all because of his love for us – which is yet another component of his unfailing goodness. The bottom line is that he wants us with him in heaven. In the words of our text: ***Of his own will he brought us forth*** (that is, he gave us rebirth, life and salvation) ***by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.***

Our simple prayer this morning is then that God the Holy Spirit would crush every last bit of sinful apathy in us through a renewed appreciation of our own terrible sinfulness, and then that he would flood our hearts with true joy, comfort, and peace in the deliverance he himself has provided through faith alone in Jesus Christ. ***"Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!"*** Amen.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 35:4-7a** Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you." ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶ then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; ⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.

^{ESV} **Mark 7:31-37** Then he returned from the region of Tyre and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. ³² And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment, and they begged him to lay his hand on him. ³³ And taking him aside from the crowd privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and after spitting touched his tongue. ³⁴ And looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." ³⁵ And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. ³⁶ And Jesus charged them to tell no one. But the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. ³⁷ And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, "He has done all things well. He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak."

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The 15th Sunday after Pentecost – September 6, 2015

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 4 (Red Hymnal)

"God Himself Is Present"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Isaiah 35:4-7a) Our Old Testament lesson is a picturesque prophesy that again had its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Though He performed these miracles literally while on earth, still today Christ is "**opening the eyes of the blind**" when he calls sinners to repentance through the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 121 (Supplement page 42) (Brown Hymnal)(Read Responsively)

The Second Lesson: (Mark 7:31-37) Even while Jesus still walked this earth, some were recognizing in Him the fulfillment of many Old Testament prophesies. In this reading we hear of the fulfillment of the prophecy in our Old Testament lesson. Later, Christian evangelists like Paul and Apollos used this evidence to demonstrate to the Jews that Jesus was indeed the Promised Messiah. Don't forget to thank him for also curing your spiritual blindness by creating saving faith in your heart.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15 (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 357 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Thou Art Mine Forever"

The Sermon – Text: James 1:17-22 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"**God Is Good - Always**"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn - 370 (Red Hymnal)

"My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less"

The Offering

The Prayer followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -357 (Verses 5-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Thou Art Mine Forever"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance - Last Sunday (50) Average (52)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship w/communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Coffee/Fellowship Time

CLC News – Pastor Peter Evensen is considering the call to serve as a full-time resident missionary in India. Pastor Robert List of Gethsemane, Spokane has announced his retirement at year end.

Sunday School Teachers – We are in need of one more volunteer to teach our children in this year's Sunday School. Please speak to the Pastor if you are willing to share in this important work.

Upcoming Schedule – Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend out of town meetings this week and next. Our regular (non-Summer) schedule will begin next Sunday with Sunday School and Bible Class at 9 am. Our midweek schedule will begin September 23, with Confirmation Class at 6 pm and Midweek Bible Study at 7 pm.

Sunday School Teachers and Parents of Confirmation Student – please meet with the Pastor during the fellowship time this morning.

West Central Pastoral Conference – This coming week Pastor Roehl is scheduled to attend the West Central Pastoral Conference in Hecla, SD. Copies of the papers delivered at that conference will be made available. For a listing of those papers, please consult the agenda as printed on the back page of the most recent edition of the Lutheran Spokesman. Please also pray for safe travel and fruitful meetings.

Lawn Volunteers – Our current lawn-care team (Willie and Paul) have asked to be relieved of their duties after many years of faithful service. We are therefore looking for replacement(s). See Brian.