

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

We Have Good Reasons to Be Thankful

1. For God is the giver of good and perfect gifts
2. For God does not change like shifting shadows

Friday is traditionally known as “Black Friday”, the day in which the merchants offer great deals to try and get people spending money for Christmas. Some people get up before the crack of dawn to hopefully get all of their shopping done. They are willing to fight against traffic and people to get it done. Some people actually enjoy this and live for this day. In my opinion they are a little crazy; but they sure do love it.

I love seeing our children find joy in the gifts they receive. But I don’t always enjoy the stress of trying to get them things that they want. Sometimes they ask for things we can’t afford. Sometimes we think they want something they don’t really want. So it is sad to see the disappointment on their faces. Unfortunately all of this can kind of ruin the whole season. It can become a chore instead of a joy. That’s a sad thing. It shouldn’t be.

God doesn’t look at gift giving this way, and He doesn’t only limit His gift giving to Christmas time. Jesus said in Matthew 7:9–11, **“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? ¹¹ If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”** God doesn’t give gifts that are worthless. He doesn’t give gifts that he doesn’t think about or just purchase things because they are on sale. He knows us well. He studies us. He knows what will be good for us and what would be bad for us. He knows when we need gifts and when we don’t. He’s not even afraid to give us gifts we don’t ask for and ones that we curl our noses at, because He knows what is for our spiritual good. So James says that **“Every good and perfect gift is from above.”** There is no gift from God that is bad for our spiritual good. This is a great reason to be thankful.

When you study James’ words carefully in the original language, you can see that James uses two words to describe how God gives to us; and they describe two different things. They are pronounced “do-sis” and “do-ray-ma.” Dosis has to do with the act of giving. Dorayma is referring to the gift itself.

So what does this tell us? The whole process of giving comes from God and not just the gift! Think about it! We don’t just rejoice in the forgiveness of sins or the gift of heaven. We also rejoice in the WAY that God GAVE it to us - in His ACT of giving. This is what Christmas is really all about. We have a God who volunteered to take on flesh and be born into our world; not to live a powerful and successful and pampered life; but to suffer and die a painful death on a cross to pay for our sins. The way that Jesus gave us this perfect and complete gift - which resulted in Him paying the full price for all of our sins; this is the greatest reason to be thankful.

Even when we look at Jesus’ life prior to the cross, we see evidence of a very giving God in the flesh. Look at how giving Jesus was while He walked on our earth - how He was constantly being asked to heal this person or

that person - to come here or to go there. He would personally place His hands on people and speak with them. Not one place in Scripture do we hear Jesus complaining about how tired He is or how He doesn't have time for this person or that. It shows a willingness in Him. He wanted to give. He still does!

Think again of how Jesus went to the cross. The writer to the Hebrews says, **Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.** (12:2) It wasn't easy and it wasn't fun. It wasn't joyful for Him to suffer, yet He still willingly gave Himself for us for the joy of knowing that He could give us the gift of heaven.

Not only is this so, but God also wanted to GIVE us this forgiveness through faith so that we wouldn't have to earn it. He rejoiced in giving this to us because He knew we wouldn't be able to earn it.

What did the devil use to get Adam and Eve to fall into sin? He convinced them that God had been cheap with them - that He was holding something back from them; that the Garden of Eden and even the Tree of Knowledge weren't GOOD gifts. Unbelievers are constantly accusing God of being cheap and chintzy; of being stingy and mean.

We who believe in what Jesus GAVE us and continues to give us - we say, "How can you accuse God of such things?" This same God has chosen to keep us well fed and take special care of us. The way He does this - the process of giving is a gift. He has chosen to use mothers and fathers, fellow Christians, and even the government to give and provide for us. Some of these people are very tender and kind. Imagine if God just dealt with us like a vending machine. The child needs milk. Put a quarter in the machine. We need food. A hamburger just falls from the sky - without a word or without a touch. God doesn't give this way. He uses people who deal with us personally. He likes working through people and getting them involved in the process - so that we as Christians can witness the joy of giving someone something they really need.

Sometimes we might sinfully avoid someone when we are afraid they are going to ask us for something. God doesn't avoid us at all. He loves it when we ask Him for things and even commands it because He WANTS to give us things. Think about what James says later on.

You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
(Jas 4:2-3)

Here James is chastising people - first of all because they don't ask. Second of all, because they only ask for themselves - because they aren't being generous. God wants us to be givers and enjoy giving. That is a part of thanksgiving. But if we think that God has been cheap with us or that He is a stingy God, we won't want to be generous with anyone. James says, "**Every good and perfect gift is from above.**" He also says that God's gifts are "**coming down.**" They keep coming down on a regular basis.

Luther had an interesting quote when it comes to God's gifts as he mentioned the material blessings we have in connection with the spiritual blessings.

We were not created like oxen and donkeys; we were created for eternity. Therefore when God speaks with us to give a promise, does He concern Himself with the belly only? No. The external promises are like a shell; but the essential part of the nut and its real nature is Christ and eternal life. Moreover, the material promises are like nuts and apples with which we attract children to ourselves. Thus we are led and attracted to the love of eternal things, and the hope of immortality is nourished, so to speak, by the material promises. God gives me bread and water, not in order that I may eat and drink like a horse or a mule, which have no understanding (Ps. 32:9), but that from this physical gift I may gain a knowledge of the goodness of God and may encourage and comfort myself with it in other needs too. If He gave you only straw, He still wants you to know that He is the eternal God and that His goodness is boundless. If you believe this, you have eternal life. (LW 3:149)

So if you think about why some of our members will find every reason not to come to worship - doesn't it a part of it come down to this? They have forgotten where all of their gifts and abilities come from. We need to remember who gives us all of our gifts and why He gives them to us - to bring us back to Him with happy and joyful and believing hearts.

Who is this giver of gifts? James says that this constant giver is “**the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.**” The heavenly lights - the sun, moon and stars are the most dependable things that humanity has had to plan their seasons and days and years. We can know exactly when the sun will set and rise to the exact minute as the year progresses. We revolve our work days and our vacations around the sun in many ways - depending on when it will be cold or hot and when the sun will shine. When the sun goes down earlier and earlier during the last part of the year we find ourselves hibernating more and more; unwilling to get out in the dark even though it may only be 5:30 at night. The sun and the moon are predictable and solid for us.

James uses those lights and points back to their Creator. He wants to reason and say, “How much more is the Father who created those lights?” He is dependable. So His gifts are also. You know that He will keep His word and He won't change His mind. Think of the parable of the workers - where the man hiring the workers told them exactly what he would give them before he hired them. Then, when some were hired later and worked less - those who were hired earlier thought that the boss would give them more. He didn't, because he stuck to the original agreement. Some of you may have dealt with someone who promised they would help pay for something. Perhaps you were depending on getting an inheritance, only to find out that the one you depended on changed their mind and backed out of the deal. God doesn't work that way.

When He promises that our sins have been paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ, He doesn't change His mind. When He says that we are saved through faith in trusting what Jesus has done for us, He doesn't change His mind. Even before Jesus was born - it wasn't as if people were saved via a different method than we are. Abraham was saved by faith in the Savior to come, David was saved by grace, Moses too was saved by faith, and so we are saved by faith in the Savior who came. God has always said that salvation is by grace, through faith in the Savior.

So God wants to give through you. A part of being a light to this world is also by being dependable to people; by keeping your word and doing what you said you would do. Husbands are called on to regularly and constantly care for and feed their wives and children. Wives are called on to dependably take care of their

husbands and try to meet their needs. Members are called on to pray for one another and reach out to each other in a time of need. This is how God generates thanks in each other as He gives to each other through us.

He doesn't change like shifting shadows. A shadow is dependent on the light and it shifts according to the light. Without the sun there would be no shadow. Some of you may remember finding shelter under the shadow of the tree during the outdoor service. You had to time it just right according to the time of day, because the shadow shifts as the day goes on. We don't have to do that with God. We don't have to wonder where to find Him. We don't have to try and guess at where He will be. He is always found in the Word. He always speaks the same Words to us. He always works through the waters of baptism to bring unbelievers to faith. He always gives us His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper. These are dependable gifts from the Father of the heavenly lights.

There are some who grow bored with the Bible because they say, "I've heard it all before." So they chase after new visions and words. Think of how people today claim to have instant revelation from God based on the way their heart feels from one moment and one day to the next. They try to figure out which person or job God is leading them to based on their feelings and emotions. One day God leads them one way and the next day God "speaks to their heart" to go another. What a scary and shadowy place to be! God's Word and His will isn't like that. We know what sin is. We know where salvation is found. We know what baptism and the Lord's Supper give. It's why Luther loved to say we are saved by Scripture ALONE and by grace ALONE and by faith ALONE. It made him thankful for the Gospel. It makes us thankful for the same dependable and constant word of truth.

A young three year old girl by the name of Marie saved a two year old boy by the name of Denis from drowning. She received the Bronze Medal for "an act of courage and dangerous sacrifice." But Denis didn't like her. The story goes that when Denis fell into the municipal pool, she grabbed him by the hair and held his head out of the water until her screams for help were answered. Marie said, "He doesn't like me now because it hurt when I pulled his hair."

Thanksgiving is meant as a time to give thanks. A part of giving thanks takes time - to reflect on what you've been given and where your gifts have come from. Sometimes God's gifts hurt. Sometimes they feel good. The greatest gift you have is your salvation through the cross and resurrection of Christ; which hurt Jesus yet gave Him joy. He spent His all on your salvation. He left nothing for you to pay. He gave it to you free of charge. You don't have to do one deed to earn it. It was given to you free of charge.

This good and perfect Giver is generous with you. He promises to give all you need, not all you want. He knows when to give you your gifts and when to withhold them. You have no reason to live in fear or to worry about the days to come, for the Father of the Heavenly Lights is still taking care of you. He doesn't change and He doesn't leave. What a wonderful giver of the Perfect Gift we have. Give thanks to the Lord. Amen.