**Giving Birth**

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雅各書James 1: 17-27 9/1/2024

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Last week, we concluded our August series on "The Gospel of John: The Bread of Life." Prayer: Lord God, prepare our hearts, quiet the many voices within us, and help us to hear only Your voice, to receive Your words of truth, words of life, and to follow You on the path of truth.

This month, we will begin a new series on the Book of James. James expresses his thoughts in a more circuitous manner, making it harder to understand and remember. Let us pray for the Lord's guidance.

Today's theme, "Giving Birth," comes from verse 18 of our scripture. God "chose to give us birth through the word of truth, according to His own will." Have you ever reflected on the identity and recognition of a Christian? "We are born through the word of truth" clearly states our identity.

The second half of the same verse, "that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all He created," points out that we are not only the first among all creation, but the "firstfruits"—the first and finest of the harvest.

Heavenly Father, with complete freedom, gave birth to us, granted us life, and created us. He also calls us the firstfruits. This is both a privilege and a responsibility. The Book of James carefully teaches us about this special role from two aspects:

• How we should act: By giving to those who rely on us through honesty, humility, gratitude, patience, steadfastness, and generosity, we demonstrate God's own unchanging goodness and generosity.

• How we should not act: A double-minded person, unstable in all they do. James criticizes those who respond with only partial commitment.

Why should we give generously? Because of the Creator who gave us life. (Who is God? Our view of God.)

Verse 17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights..." Every good gift, every generous act, and every perfect gift comes from above, from God. This tells us that God is generous; He reveals Himself through acts of generosity: generosity is a part of God's unchanging nature. As many hymns say, He is the "God of grace and God of glory," a Lord without "shifting shadows."

In verse 5, James says: God is "the one who gives generously to all without finding fault." He does not find fault; He is a God who does not refuse to give gifts to anyone. Even when we do not ask Him, this great God is still generous in bestowing gifts upon us in His creation.

God is not a harsh, stingy, frowning, or fierce deity. That is not His image. He is a God who gives gifts, a merciful and generous God, a God who "loves the world." As John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." God loves, and so He gave us life and blessings. He even paid the price by sacrificing His own Son to give and bless us.

To accomplish something valuable requires paying the price of love and giving generously. The God of love gives generously; He is a giving God. He is generous and merciful, not cold or miserly.

**God’s generosity is expressed in giving birth**

Whenever and wherever we see giving and sacrifice, we see God's clear footprint. Every act of generosity, every kind word, every hug or gentle pat on the shoulder, reaching out to help someone climb steep or rugged stairs, donating to charity, volunteering at hospitals, libraries, or museums, donating hair, organs, or blood, planning an estate donation—these and many other forms of generosity are ways in which God works through us. Whether explicitly recognized or not, God does not need a title to be present. No matter how we view Him, He is God. Whether you are a Christian or not, giving is a reflection of God. James tells us that every generous act of giving comes from above because God is generous. When we dedicate ourselves to God, just as He dedicated Himself, we offer ourselves to the spirit of God's generosity.

In verse 18, James says, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth." God is both Father and Mother. He gave us birth through the word of truth. Through this generous act, God gave us life. God's generosity is a form of creation, a birthing. His gifts lead us to life; His generosity creates new life. We are born through the word of God's truth. The Word became flesh, "full of grace and truth" (John 1). God's word of truth gives birth to us, and truth gives birth to wondrous things, making us God's marvelous masterpieces.

Truth not only sets us free; it nurtures life. Truth perfects us, enabling us to become what God desires us to be. Because the Word that became flesh in Jesus Christ is the way of truth and life, through Jesus Christ, by accepting and believing in the truth of salvation, we are born again. God "gave us birth through the word of truth." We need this truth to fill our world even more—in our society and in our churches. If so, there will be less deceit, and lies will cease. God is so generous in granting us His truth, allowing us to find freedom and live new lives on earth. God gave us birth through the word of truth.

Our giving is rooted in God’s love, which is the divine source. Our generosity is a sign of our rebirth from above. Being born again transforms our selfish nature into the nature and image of God’s giving spirit in Christ. When we generously give our time, talents, money, energy, and effort, we participate in creation, sharing in His nature and image of giving. In whatever form it takes, when we dedicate ourselves, God’s love is born into the world, and more of God’s virtues are brought into being through us. Through giving, we show that we are "doers" of His word.

God’s word has power, and the word of truth is effective. It gives birth to new life and gifts. Our offerings are gifts, and through them, God generates life in the world. In the act of giving, through caring for the orphans and widows in distress, we embody God’s generosity, bringing new life to more people in society.

The passage today from the Book of James speaks to the role of Christians, highlighting some challenging lessons and calling readers to cultivate a life of godliness.

Reflecting on what we've covered so far:

First, we should embody the image of God's giving nature, which He instilled in us through creation. By practicing honesty, humility, gratitude, patience, steadfastness, and generosity, we should give to those who rely on us, demonstrating God's unchanging goodness and generosity.

Second, we should not be double-minded. James is particularly concerned with how we speak. Because words are so easy to use, so direct, and yet so difficult to control, James uses our speech as a test of our true loyalty.

He advises us that we cannot casually insult our neighbors (who, like us, are created in God's image) and then presume that we have received God's approval. We cannot express God's wrath just because we are angry with others. Similarly, merely hearing God's teachings without putting them into practice shows that we have not benefited from His commands; we remain unstable, half-hearted believers. The integrity of our inheritance from the Father—our identity and self-image—depends on whether we treat others with integrity and respect.

James seems to place significant importance on a person's actions. However, he points out a fundamental premise: we are born of God's word, the firstfruits, and we should strive to produce good deeds. If our lives are filled with anger, coarse language, insults, and lies, our souls become like barren fields, unable to nurture the implanted word of God and truth within us. Our fickle emotions and self-righteous speech align us with the forces of sin and death in this world. Yet, through patient humility, we can make space for God's way of salvation to be expressed in us. James urges us to live in a manner worthy of God and the truth.

In conclusion:

Today's scripture reminds us that by dedicating ourselves in any way, we participate in God's ongoing process of creation. Every new day, God continuously brings forth new life. Through each act of generous giving, He is constantly creating new life and new creation. God, who created the world, was born in a manger, and is continually at work within us, gives us life so that we can live generously, abundantly, and eternally. By doing so, we help others experience new birth, new life, and new hope in God every day.

Love is the foundation. God's love is the midwife of our birth. Love brings generosity into the world. God created us and redeemed us; He gives us sustenance and offers Himself to us because He is unreservedly generous. God's generosity overflows every day, continually bringing forth new creation. This week, this month, this year—what will you create? What will be born from your life?

For people of faith, gratitude is tangibly expressed through giving, acknowledging what God has accomplished for us. This visible gratitude may not be about money for everyone. It could be grateful worship or forgiveness. What will you give birth to? God gave you life so that you, too, can create.

In giving, we receive life. We do not give in order to receive, but often, in giving, we receive more than we ever imagined. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

My prayer is that we give our hearts to God, allowing the word of truth to give us life. May God's word of truth create in us the strength to give and participate in God's ongoing creation. May God bless everyone who hears His word and acts upon it. Amen.