

A. Introduction

1. Reviewing the Context of the Text

2. Text: *In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.*

B. God's Goodness in His Salvation

1. Salvation through the New Birth

2. Salvation by God's Grace^A

3. Salvation Proclaimed
 - a. by the word of truth^B

 - b. the salvation-bringing gospel^C

C. God's Goodness in His Purpose

1. His Purpose in the First Fruits
 - a. their importance in Jewish feasts^D

 - b. as representing the new church^E

2. His Purpose of the Harvest^F

D. Conclusion

1. Another Harvest ... fruit in our lives (John 15:5)

2. Continuing First Fruits (new generations of believers)

^A Romans 4:4-5

^B Ephesians 1:13, Colossians 1:5, 2 Corinthians 6:1-10, 2 Timothy 2:15

^C Romans 1:16-17, 1 Corinthians 1:17, Galatians 1:3-5

^D Leviticus 23:10-11, 15-17

^E John 1:12-13, Matthew 9:38

^F Revelation 7:9-10

A. Introduction

1. Reviewing the Context of our Text

- a. it has been over a month since we looked at this book of James
- b. so, let us have a quick review of James 1 before looking at our text
- c. James has been addressing the matter of the various trials experienced by Christians: external testings and internal temptations
- d. with a view to equipping his readers to find victory in each
- e. James has just dealt with the erroneous idea that some may have, namely, that temptation to sin can come from God: look at verse 13
- f. **13 Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.**
- g. that is a lesson that James wants to hammer home: temptation to sin does not come from God but from within; from our old, fallen nature
- h. he does not want Christians to be mistaken about this fact: verse 16, **Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.**
- i. so he gives additional reasons that we can be assured about this
 - (A) verse 17: **Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shifting shadow.**
 - (B) God is a giver of good things, not of evil things such as tempting
 - (C) moreover, God is unchanging in His nature – so we can rely upon this fact that as He has been good in the past, so He is today
 - (D) that is the first reason: God's unchanging goodness assures us that He will not tempt us to sin
- j. then comes the second reason, in today's ...

2. Text: **'In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first**

fruits among His creatures.'

- a. simply stated, the second reason we can be assured that God will not tempt us to sin is that to do so would be contrary to His action and purpose in saving us from sin
- b. and we shall examine this verse in that specific light

B. God's Goodness In His Salvation

1. Salvation through the New Birth

- a. the NT uses many different words and concepts in order to describe the nature of salvation
- b. the one used here is that of birth – 'He brought us forth'
 - (A) 'He begat us' – this is the only place in the Bible where this particular verb can be construed as being done by the Father – rather is is a medical and technical term marking the close of pregnancy in the bringing forth of a child
 - (B) it is the same word that was used back in verse 15 describing the final results of temptation: 'when sin is accomplished' – when it comes to full term – 'it brings forth death'
 - (C) but this is not a physical birth, but the birth from above that is the work of the Holy Spirit: the new birth; being born again
- c. that is the particular aspect of salvation in view here
 - (A) that we are born anew – regenerated
 - (B) that we are given a new nature, to be nurtured and to displace the old, corrupt nature inherited from Adam
 - (C) that we, like a baby, are put into new relationships
 - (1) a new relationship with God, and thus
 - (2) into new relationships with other members of God's family
- d. in this new life in Christ is made evident the goodness of God

2. Salvation by God's Grace

- a. the goodness of God in His providing salvation for fallen mankind is not something that He was forced to do
 - (A) there is nothing intrinsically good in mankind as a whole, nor in any of us as individuals, obligating

God to save us

- (B) we are born under a debt of sin: like a credit card that is maxed out, the interest against that debt grows daily
 - (C) if we were to pile up all our good deeds, they would be overwhelmed by that mountain of our debt of sin
 - (D) **Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favour, but as what is due.** (Romans 4:4)
– it cannot pay off the back debt; at best only that which comes due at this moment
 - (E) so, God did not have to provide salvation
- b. He did so, **'in the exercise of His will'** or, **'of His own will'**
- (A) these phrases are used to translate a single word in Greek; an action word, describing a particular act of God
 - (B) it was by an act of God's own will – not by any external event – that **'He brought us forth'** – it was all of God's grace
 - (C) thus Paul can continue in Romans 4:5, **'But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness'**
- c. God's goodness is known to us in salvation through grace

3. Salvation Proclaimed

- a. James continues showing the means by which God has made known this salvation by grace through the new birth
- b. it is **'by the word of truth'**
 - (A) when the Bible uses the term 'the Scriptures' it is talking about itself; what we sometimes refer to as God's written word
 - (B) but when it uses the term 'word' in its various phrases, such as **'the word of the Lord'**, **'the word of God'**, **'the word of faith'**, **'the word of life'**, and, here, **'the word of truth'**, it usually is placing an emphasis upon some aspect or portion of God's revelation (or, in some cases, His non-revelation)
 - (C) that emphasis can be discovered from other NT uses of the phrase, **'the word of truth'**:
 - (1) **In Him, you also, after listening to the message (lo/gon - word) of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise,**

(Ephesians 1:13)

- (2) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel (Colossians 1:5)
- (3) 'the word of truth' is specifically the gospel
- (4) it was in the proclamation of 'the word of truth' that Paul underwent so much hardship (see 2 Corinthians 6:1-10)
- (5) and it is in the handling of the gospel, that our Awana verse charges us, 'Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.' (2 Timothy 2:15)

c. it is through the gospel, that one can come to salvation

- (A) 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, «but the righteous man shall live by faith.» (Romans 1:16-17)
- (B) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. (1 Corinthians 1:17)
- (C) and in Galatians 1:3-5, in his opening doxology, '3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.' Paul essentially defines the gospel so his readers can perceive the character of the fake gospel that false teachers would have them believe.

d. God's goodness is made evident by the of salvation

C. God's Goodness In His Purpose

1. His Purpose in the First Fruits

a. the first fruits were an important symbol in Jewish life

- (A) at Passover, the barley was ready for harvesting and the first sheaf was presented, '10 ... When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. 11 He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it.' (Leviticus 23:10-11)

- (B) barley in the field is not barley in the granary, so this symbolic offering of the first fruits was an act of faith, recognizing God's pledge to provide the harvest to His people
- (C) at Pentecost, two loaves made with yeast were likewise waved before the Lord: **'15 You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. 16 You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the Lord. 17 You shall bring in from your dwelling places two loaves of bread for a wave offering, made of two-tenths of an ephah; they shall be of a fine flour, baked with leaven as first fruits to the Lord'** (Leviticus 23:15-17)
- (D) this symbolic offering of the first fruits from the wheat harvest was an act both of thanksgiving for the harvest just ended, and of faith for the wheat harvest just begun
- (E) you see, then that there was a series of such first fruit offerings
- b. one of God's purposes in providing and proclaiming this salvation by grace through Jesus Christ whereby as **'12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.'** (John 1:12-13)
 - (A) was that the NT church, consisting first of Jews, and then of Gentiles, was to be a kind, **'as it were the first fruits'**
 - (B) that NT church were the first of a series of first fruits
 - (C) each generation in the church of Jesus Christ is a cause of praise for what God has done in the past, and a pledge from God that His work is going on ... **'Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.'** (Matthew 9:38)
- c. God's salvation of those first few generations of the church in James' day, was an evidence of God's goodness

2. His Purpose of the Harvest

- a. but as each generation of the church shows, the harvest goes on
- b. the verse concludes with these words, **'among His creatures'**, or more fully, **'we are to be a kind of firstfruits of those which are created of God'**

- c. quite frankly, there is not a single interpretation of those last words, but it is certainly quite true that it can be applied in this fashion that the NT church was, at least, the first fruit, the pledge of God, of those who would likewise be born of God, those coming to faith in Christ and are thereby born again; new creations
- d. God's harvest goes on and one day the reaping will be over, and, as we read in Revelation 7:9-10, '9 After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; 10 and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"
- e. the purpose of God in the salvation of an innumerable multitude is yet further evidence of the goodness of God

D. Conclusion

1. Another Harvest

- a. let me turn our thoughts away, for a moment, from this great harvest that is being conducted even at this very time, to a very personal and individual harvest that is going on
- b. the Bible speaks of fruit being the outgrowth of the work of the Holy Spirit in each believer – fruit is one of the objects of God's harvest
- c. look back in your own life over this year just past
 - (A) what sins have been overcome? give God the glory
 - (B) what virtues have been granted? praise God for them
- d. but look forward to the coming year
 - (A) what thorns and thistles need still to be taken out of your life?
 - (B) what fruit of the Spirit need watering and nurturing in order to grow and to ripen?
- e. these are not things of which we ourselves are capable of achieving
- f. Jesus gave the secret in John 15:5, 'I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.'
- g. and before this can happen, a person must first have been part of

2. The Continuing First Fruits of new believers
 - a. born from above by God
 - b. through the acceptance of the message of the gospel
 - c. believing in `... the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue (that is, save) us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.' (Galatians 1:3-4)
 - d. be sure this day that you have taken that step so as to know on a very real and personal basis the goodness of God.

1. © 2012 by Garth Hutchinson, Faith Fellowship Baptist Church of Aurora (Ontario): may be distributed or quoted freely, only let this be done to the glory “of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

Except as noted otherwise, quotations are from the New American Standard version, used by permission. Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon.

Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in *(braces)*. Version identifiers are:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Some of my commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, Michigan – Volume 12, James, by Donald W. Burdick, Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary, ISBN 0-310-36540-6
- EGT – The Expositor’s Greek Testament, *James*, by W. E. Oesterley, Hodder & Stoughton, 1910 (Liberal, but generally helpful on Greek idiom.)
- Lange – Commentary on the Holy Scriptures by John Peter Lange, translated by Philip Schaff, Volume 9 of the New Testament; Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1915 (His interpretations sometimes take strange twists.)
- NICNT – The New International Commentary on the New Testament, *Commentary on the Epistles of James and John* by Alexander Ross, Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954 – ISBN 0-8028-2192-8
- TYN – Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, *The General Epistle of James*, by Professor R. V. G. Tasker, The Tyndale Press, 1956
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.